

AFRICA CALLING

By the Same Author

CLAWS OF AFRICA

Demy 8vo. 272 pages. With
a frontispiece

" It is packed with thrills "
News-Chronicle

AFRICA CALLING

*The True Account of the Author's
Strange Workaday Experiences
in Kenya, Uganda, and
the Belgian Congo*

By

ROGER COURTNEY

LONDON
GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
BOMBAY & SYDNEY

First published 1935
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD
182 High Holborn, London, W C 1

Copyright All rights reserved

*Made in Great Britain Printed by Sherratt & Hughes
at the St Ann's Press, Manchester*

FOR
MICHAEL

FOREWORD

MY previous book, *Claws of Africa*, described my adventures as a White Hunter. The present volume tells chiefly of adventures that befell me during intervals in my White Hunting career, when, because of the season or for other reasons, there was little activity in the White Hunting business, and it was necessary that I should engage in other occupations for the time being. These occupations were numerous and varied. The experiences are described exactly as they happened, and illustrate the truth of the saying that there is always "out of Africa something new." The book has been written chiefly in response to numerous flattering requests from readers of my first volume for more fare of the same kind.

R. C.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. GOLD STRIKE	9
II. A PURSUIT	29
III. LONE CAMP	43
IV. A MURDER—AND WORSE	57
V. THE DRUM	73
VI. A MAGICIAN	83
VII. MORE MAGIC	97
VIII. A NIGHT OF UNREST	109
IX. JUNGLE WILES	120
X. THE POACHER	130
XI. THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE	142
XII. KIL'NGOZI	154
XIII. GOING FISHING	165
XIV. THE WAIF	176
XV. BUSHED	189
XVI. THE NANDI BEAR	200
XVII. WIFE ON OFFER	205
XVIII. BABES OF THE BUSH	218
XIX. TO THE TRAIL AGAIN	229

CHAPTER I

GOLD STRIKE

I AM a man whom no place or set of circumstances can satisfy for long, and it was primarily because of this that I found myself engaged in the extraordinary race to a new gold strike, the story of which opens this account of some of my adventures in Equatorial Africa.

For some time I had been a lone ranger on a timber concession thirty miles up-country from Londiani, in the heart of Kenya, an experience that at first was interesting and exciting enough, what with hunting big game in my spare time and familiarizing myself generally with the African life, to which I had come from England only a year or two before. But the day arrived when I was thoroughly sick of it all, of the sight of my natives and of the fact that it was long since I had seen a white man, and of my camp and particular trees and stumps that stood before it, and even a near-by stream that once I had thought romantic because of the way it tinkled and the way the foliage of its banks was thickly green; and one morning I took a mule and set off for Londiani, intending vaguely to camp there a few days and have a change.

Now, Londiani is no great gay city, but merely a small station on the railway between Nairobi and Lake Victoria, with an hotel, an Indian store, and a few dwellings, and with nothing much for a fellow like me

AFRICA CALLING

to do except look at the very occasional trains and have a drink at the hotel and swap yarns with the one or two white wheat-farmers who come in with their grain. But after my long isolation all this was fine, and I could have put in my few days there well enough.

But it was not to be. Out of a train from Lake Victoria that halted at the station the morning after my arrival emerged a man I knew slightly. He was on his way to Nairobi, and had stepped off the train to get a drink at the hotel. He was greatly excited.

"Gold, boys!" he cried, as with a couple of my farmer friends we stood at the bar. "A new strike! I've pegged out my claim, and am off to Nairobi for an outfit!" He rushed it out at us, how he had made the strike, where it was, and all about it, every word of it obviously true. He was 'lit up' with gold fever.

"A marvellous field!" he said over and over again, and produced lumps of quartz from his pockets, with the gold showing in it thickly. "There'll be a big rush from Nairobi when they hear the news. See here—why don't you chaps have a shot at getting there first? Starting here from Londiani, you'd be that much ahead of them."

A whole lot more about the gold strike he poured out on us, including its exact location; then a whistle sounded, and in the same whirlwind manner in which he had descended upon us he departed, leaving us three discussing the proposition and getting more and more 'lit up' with gold fever ourselves.

GOLD STRIKE

We got a map and studied it. The gold strike was on the Kuja river, down towards the Tanganyika border. From here, at Londiani, the straight-line distance was about 180 miles, while from Nairobi the distance was double that. It was clear that if we started promptly we had every chance of reaching the field well in advance of the rush from Nairobi.

It did not take long to settle the matter. My friends provided a wagon and eight oxen, we got the Indian storekeeper to grubstake us, a prospecting licence was obtained, also permission to travel through native areas, I sent the owners of the timber concession a telegram stating that I was leaving their employment at once—literally gave them a moment's notice—and away we went.

Our course was south-west, with the Kavirondo Gulf and the broad expanse of Lake Victoria proper away to our right. We planned to complete the journey in about ten days, and felt very happy about it all. The knowledge that one has a chance of striking it rich in a goldfield has an almost intoxicating effect. Even the old Indian storekeeper at Londiani, who had grubstaked us, had been so infected with the gold fever that, instead of being cautious and untrusting, as one might expect such a storekeeper to be, he was delighted to be allowed to share in the venture in return for providing us with the necessary rations and tools. The manner of his farewell to us was that of a person highly privileged.

It soon became evident that we should need all our high spirits. That journey was no soft spell. The very first night a native child whom we had brought to

AFRICA CALLING

mind the oxen deserted, and the oxen got so scattered that it took the best part of the next day to find them. We found the child, a boy of twelve, away back along the road, crying his eyes out and declaring that he couldn't go with us on this expedition because it was haunted. Asked what he meant by that, he explained that while minding the oxen during the night he had seen some ghosts—four of them—which had come up out of the ground, and a low voice told him that for this expedition there was nothing but trouble. So, terribly frightened, he ran away and left the oxen, and now he wanted to get back to his home near Londiani.

We had no doubt that something had scared the child—perhaps the moonlight falling on some tree-stumps so as to give them a likeness to human forms—but our other natives were prompt to believe that it was really something supernatural, and there were expressions of grave concern on their faces as they listened to the child's story.

"*Four* ghosts!" they murmured. "They must be truly bad things that will happen." They began to tell one another of evil happenings that had followed ghost warnings. One concerned a pregnant woman who unheeded a ghost warning against saying bad things about her neighbours, and was delivered of a child which had its eyes in its back and its mouth in its breast. Another concerned a greedy man who was warned first by one ghost, then by another, that if he did not restrain his greediness he would have no body to fill with food—which warnings the man disregarded, with the result that one day, in full sight of a number

GOLD STRIKE

of the people of his village, he disappeared as he was walking along. And no one ever saw him again. "A bad business!" said our natives, in effect, shaking their close-cropped black heads. If things like those could happen as the result of one or two warnings, what could not happen from *four* warnings!

Threats of a beating quelled their rising sullenness, however, and with another oxen-minder we went on.

The next evening, hot, sweaty, and tired from a long day of trying to make up some of the lost time, we arrived at a camping place near a mission station, and had a tough time trying to prevent the mission boys imposing on us. The master of the mission and his wife were away, and the boys, left in sole charge of the place, were out to make the most they could of their opportunity. Mission natives on occasion may be quite all right, but these definitely weren't. They were an objectionable-looking crew, with unctuous smiles on their jet-black faces, hypocritical, and over-dressed in smart felt hats, high collars, white shirts, stiffly creased trousers carefully pulled up to display patterned socks, and bright yellow shoes. They carried canes, or little hooked walking-sticks, and most had on smoked glasses, as though the sun hurt their eyes.

In carefully correct Swahili—they knew not a word of English—they tried to make us pay for a camping site, though we were not on mission ground, but only near it. They sold us baskets of sweet potatoes, which had fine big ones on top and underneath only bad ones, and a quantity of eggs that we bought from them were sickeningly stale. They tried a lot of things like that on

AFRICA CALLING

us, and in the end we decided it was our turn. We told them we had brought with us the very latest hymn, and would teach it to them, in English, so that they could sing it to their master and mistress when they returned. Their master and mistress, we told them, would be surprised to hear them sing this, and in English—very surprised.

The mission boys, always ready for an opportunity to curry favour with their master, smiled in their oily way, and said they would like to learn the new hymn very much. After a bit of consultation we concocted a verse of considerable lewdness and set it to a doleful tune of sorts.

We had put the word Halleluiah into it, as it was a word they knew, but the rest was foreign to them, and called for so much rehearsal that we began to think they'd never do it. But, being anxious to impress their master and mistress, they persevered, and in the end were able to sing the words right through without a mistake. They were very pleased when at last they could do this, and when they left us, swinging their little canes, we could hear them singing those highly improper words all the way back to the mission. We three sat back and let go the laughter which had been banking up in us during the singing practice, laughed till we were nearly ill, and only wished we could be present next day when the master and mistress of the mission returned and their boys sang them their new 'hymn.' At the cost of a few bad potatoes and stale eggs it had been a cheap entertainment.

Still anxious to make up the time lost through the desertion of the child who minded the oxen, we in-

spanned very early next morning—but a couple of hours after sunrise came to a sudden stop. It looked as though our journey to find a gold strike needn't continue another mile.

We had come across one right in the road! There it was, staring at us! The iron-tyred wheel of the wagon had broken open the ironstone cap of the reef, leaving the shining yellow metal exposed. It was a great moment! We gave a loud "Hurrah!" that startled even the oxen, and made the natives look at us as though we'd suddenly gone crazy. We got our picks and things and started digging into the reef. Gold! There were loads of it! Lumps as big as your fist! We heaved out hunks and picked them up tremblingly. I was damned near crying, and I reckon the others were too. It is no small thing to be suddenly swung up into riches, especially when you're only twenty-one, as I was. Older heads than ours would have been turned by sight of what we found there in the road.

Then it grew on us that perhaps there was a catch in it somewhere. It looked too good to be true. This feeling was strengthened by the offer of some local natives, who had come up, to show us where there was plenty more of the stuff. There were heaps of it near by, they said. With doubt and fear in our hearts, we gave one of them a sixpence to show us, and presently came on a place where every second stone was a-glitter with the yellow metal.

The doubt and fear now fairly eating us up, we dug into the stuff with our knives, and it struck us that, for gold, it was very hard. It was, also, not heavy enough. Further, one of us remembered stories of new-chum

AFRICA CALLING

miners, like ourselves, being taken in with a stuff commonly called "Fools' Gold," which was in reality iron pyrites ; and I recollected a man once telling of a similar stuff called "mundic." After further examination we were compelled reluctantly to accept the fact that it was only "Fools' Gold" after all, and that the fortune-revealing propensities of the wagon-wheel were a snare and a delusion.

Hot and disappointed, we went on, and a little later, coming to a river, we rested the oxen and went in for a swim. It was a lovely pool, but one in which it was unwise to stay for long, because of the possible approach of crocodiles. Our idea was to have a quick swim and then out again. In we went, but when we made to come out it was to find a number of native girls, clad only in a string or two of flowers, standing round our clothes and watching us with great interest.

None of us was over-modest, but there's something about a white man that makes him dislike parading nude before a bunch of native girls—he feels that somehow it is undermining his prestige as a white man—and we shouted to them to go away. But they didn't go away. They were very interested in what a white man looked like without his clothes, and were determined to stay round and see. For some time this odd comedy went on ; but at last the risk of the crocodiles became too much for us, and, prestige or no prestige, we had to dash up out of the water. Two of us dressed with the eyes of the maidens full upon us, while the third tried to do so behind a rock, where, however, he was surprised by a prying lassie, who only left him in

peace when he gave her a good smart smack on the buttocks. I don't think there was anything nasty in their prying ; it was just that they were overcome with curiosity at the colour of our skins, which was so much lighter than that of the only men they knew—natives. Though they had seen white men before, they had never seen them without clothing.

Shortly after this little interlude we met the returning master and mistress of the mission whose sanctimonious boys had tried to impose on us. They were on bicycles, wobbling along one behind the other, the man a large, severe-looking person in a sun-helmet, a black alpaca jacket, white sandshoes, and plus-fours wide enough to be plus-eights, and the woman in a dark skirt and light blouse, thick black stockings and heavy boots. Each wore sun-glasses and had bad teeth, the woman's projecting. They were a queer-looking pair to meet in the African wilds. They told us that they were returning from an expedition to "shoot a few animals and preach a little bit of the word of God." We contented ourselves with saying that we had camped near their mission—which, incidentally, was concerned with the promulgation of what might be called one of the patent varieties of religion—and found their boys to be very good singers. Then, evading their questions as to whither we were bound and why, we bade them farewell, and they mounted their machines and went wobbling out of sight. A little later we met their porters, a long string of them, laden with camp gear, rifles, and some impala skins and other trophies, the hunting of which they had incorporated with the preaching of "a little bit of the word of God."

AFRICA CALLING

Their preaching in this district didn't seem to have had much effect, however, for, coming next day to a village where they had stayed, we witnessed a lewd dance. It was in connexion with some fishing activities in a river near by. The fishing was done by a number of unclothed women and girls. One lot stood in the water upstream splashing and shouting, driving the fish down to where another lot held wide, funnel-mouthed baskets in the water and trapped them. The fish, big salmon-like things, were plentiful, and there was a constant throwing of them up on to the bank from the baskets. It was an engaging spectacle; in the brightness of the sun the water sparkled like silver, and the wet bodies of the women and girls were a shining black.

There was a great stir of excitement. As the number of the fish on the bank increased the women and girls grew more and more animated. They chanted in chorus and flung up their wet arms. They laughed loudly, showing their white teeth, and playfully jostled one another. Presently, the run of the fish slackening, they trooped up on to the bank, and some one produced a drum, and they danced.

No males took part, though there was not the least objection to males looking on, including us whites. It was a dance of unclothed females, mostly face to face, with movements in fantastic imitation of those of copulation, but with a certain rhythm and grace. There was much balancing on toes and forward swaying of bodies from the hips and upthrusting of arms and straining back of breasts. It was an orgy of gesture, with the youngest of the performers the most expert.

GOLD STRIKE

The drum notes were rapped out with a real snap. There was much vigorous chanting and singing, and rolling of eyes and showing of tongues and teeth. One girl near me—she was really only a child—danced so vigorously that she was soon covered with sweat, and had to slip into the river to cool herself.

For maybe an hour the dance went on; then one by one the dancers slowed down, stopped, picked up their share of the fish, and departed to cook it. In Swahili I asked one of the male villagers the reason of the display. The burden of his answer was that he didn't know, except that the women had become excited at getting so much fish, and that it wasn't worth bothering about anyhow. "It is the way of women to behave thus sometimes," he said, in effect, making it clear from his tone that he considered this quite sufficient reason for the whole affair.

Our efforts to make up the time lost through the straying of the oxen and the finding of the "Fools' Gold" were succeeding, and by the fourth day out we were less than twelve hours behind our schedule. We reckoned that the Nairobi rush crowd would be a long way behind. But soon something happened which slowed us up. Our expedition was attacked by wild bees. African wild bees are among the world's most venomous insects; there have been cases of humans and animals being stung to death by them. On this occasion the swarm came on us as we were making our way peacefully through a harmless-looking patch of brush country. For hours all had gone well, and we three whites drowsed on the wagon. Suddenly from the *sheik ya kamba*, or boy who led the oxen, came a yell

AFRICA CALLING

of alarm, and we sprang up to find the boy running off as fast as he could, while a black cloud of angrily buzzing insects attacked the oxen.

At once the whole outfit was in uproar. The oxen strained at their yokes, bellowed, stamped, tossed their heads, swished frantically with their tails. The boys yelled and shouted, and rushed off out of the way of the bees. One of my companions jumped down to the ground, but before either of us others could follow the oxen stampeded.

Away we went, the wagon rolling and jolting over the ruts. That wagon had never travelled so fast in all its life. The oxen were galloping madly. The pole bounced, jerked, threatening to snap off at any moment. The goods in the wagon flung this way and that. The maddened oxen left the road, and the wagon jolted heavily over roots and logs.

The bees came swarming from the oxen to the wagon, a thick, buzzing mass, and we two humans leaped out over the back as best we could and left them to it. Two minutes later the wagon overturned, the pole broke, and the freed oxen went lumbering off. The bees, as though satisfied with the destruction they had wrought, disappeared.

Some of the boys went after the oxen and brought them back. Together we viewed the overturned and broken wagon, and despairingly began to plan how to effect the necessary repairs. It was astonishing to think that all this disaster should have been brought about by—insects.

Then we became aware that some natives from a village on the hill-top near by were with us. There

GOLD STRIKE

were a score or more of them, with others trooping along behind, and they informed us that the chief of the village, having seen the trouble we were in, had sent them along to help us—which was very sporty and friendly of him.

And not only that, but, when with the help of all these men we righted the wagon and pushed and dragged it to a camping place on the bank of a stream near by, he sent women to us with presents—some chickens, baskets of green mealie, gourds of milk. Savage though he was, the chief was really a fine old gentleman, and we appreciated his gifts very much, and were quite content to overlook certain indelicacies, such as the fact that the milk had a peculiar flavour through the gourds' having been washed out in cows' urine, a usual practice of the country. In the face of such spontaneous generosity one could not be finical.

We sent the chief presents in return—tobacco, snuff, salt—and in the evening went up to the village to visit him. He came forward to meet us, and proved to be a tall, frosty-haired man, with bushy eyebrows and a firm mouth. He was clad in a monkey-skin robe, and his manner was full of dignity. He held up his arm above his head in greeting, and said he hoped that we should not have too much trouble in making the repairs to our wagon. After which he took a deep pinch of the snuff that we had sent him, and we all sat down and talked, chiefly about bees and the harm they could cause, while crowds of the villagers stood round, listening.

After a time they began to bring their sick people to us. In remote villages such as this the coming of a

white man is usually a signal for the bringing forth of the sick, to be given medicine. We sent back to the camp for our box of medicines, which were mostly Epsom salts, paraffin, Stockholm tar, and emetin. Our methods were simple—Epsom salts for stomach trouble, paraffin for anything to do with the lungs, Stockholm tar for sores, and an injection of emetin for dysentery. On this basis we treated all whom, with one exception, they brought to us, several of them children, and many seemed to get better right away. Perhaps they were good medicines, those things; or perhaps it was their belief in us as healers, rather than the medicine, that cured them.

The one person we did not treat was a man who had a kind of mask over his face. As he came up the others stepped aside. Hitherto there had been a lot of chattering and excitement generally, but now there was a hush. The man stopped in front of us, and a curious sort of whispering sound came from behind the mask. He pointed to the medicine-box, and we knew that he was asking if we could do anything for him.

Then he put up a hand and removed the mask—and we were damned near sick with horror. From the eyes downward the man had no face. There was just a hole. We could see the uvula trembling at the back of his throat as he tried to speak. God knows what disease or accident had caused it. We had to look away—for more reasons than one. His eyes were on us hopefully. It was while we were looking away thus that we told him we could do nothing for him. I don't know when I've had anything harder to do.

When I looked round again he had replaced his

GOLD STRIKE

mask and was making his slow way back through the silent crowd, who stood aside to let him pass. Poor devil!

That encounter with the bees cost us nearly two days, for it took all that time to get the pole securely spliced and the various other repairs effected. When we started off again it was with growing fears that the Nairobi people might beat us to the field after all.

We started early in the morning and went on into the night, only camping then because of the weariness of the oxen. The country was getting very rough, and the roads were bad. Hitherto we had seen little of big game, but now there was plenty—elephant, rhino, lion. Their tracks, or ‘sign,’ were everywhere. This was tall-grass country, and danger from elephant was considerable.

On one occasion as we went along there came a tremendous rushing thudding in the grass to one side of the road a little way ahead. A moment later we saw just over the top of the tall grass the backs of a herd of enormous elephant.

The herd came thundering out on to the road, not more than twenty yards from us—which was dangerously close indeed. The *sheik ya kamba* swung back quickly, jerking the oxen to a standstill. The oxen trembled, their eyes staring.

We held our breaths. The herd of elephant knew we were somewhere about, but had not found us. They thundered straight across the road, into the high grass again. Most carried branches of trees in their trunks, for fly-whisks.

AFRICA CALLING

A moment or two later three more emerged, then, finally, an old big bull. This old big bull saw us.

He stopped. He looked hard at us, and flung away his branch. I felt the sweat come out on my face. It was a tremendous moment. The elephant was considering whether to come charging at us or not. What an unspeakable relief when at last he turned—reluctantly, it seemed—and followed the rest of the herd! Not until the last of the backs showing up over the top of the grass disappeared in the distance did we move.

Soon after that we came to a place where the road led into a swamp. Once there had been a bridge across the swamp, but elephant had torn it down. It was a thoroughly evil swamp, stinking so strongly that we knew it long before we came to it. It was covered with trees like mangroves, with high, hooped roots, and was full of all manner of nasty creatures, from leeches to crocodiles. The road was a mere lane between the trees, and more than three feet in slimy water.

We halted the wagon, outspanned, to give the oxen a rest, and made long tramps to the right and left of the road to discover if there was any easy way of crossing the swamp or getting round it.

But there was none. The swamp extended for miles. There was nothing for it but to set to and fell trees and saplings and 'corduroy' the lane across the swamp. We did it, but what an exhausting job it turned out, occupying our energies for a day and a half! Then, when all was ready, we yoked the oxen to the wagon, and at full speed rushed them down the slight slope

GOLD STRIKE

that led to the water's edge, into the swamp, and up the other side. There was a tremendous splashing and uproar. More than once it seemed that the oxen would never be able to do it, or that the wheels would so dislodge the 'corduroy' that they would work through on to the bottom of the swamp, and the whole affair would be stuck. But we got across at length, though by the time we reached the bank the wheels were hardly turning. We were pretty well prostrate, and many were the curses we heaped on the herd of elephant that had torn down the bridge.

Our next delay was due to a grass fire. We were still in the tall-grass country, and the fire came sweeping up towards us with terrific speed. How it started we did not know; probably it had begun many miles away, and by the time it reached us had been travelling for hours—days perhaps. The whole country to windward seemed afire. The sky was one great pall of smoke. We urged the oxen on at full speed, hoping to find some place where grass was not, or get round the edge of the fire. But it was soon clear that there was no hope of this.

There was nothing for it, then, but to stop and make a fire-break. All about us was the grass, thick grass, higher than our heads and completely dry. If the fire caught us it would just lick us up in its stride. We had to make that fire-break quickly.

It wasn't easy. The oxen were bellowing and trying to bolt, and it was all we could do to hold them. We lit a patch of the grass for our fire-break, and with this nearness of flames the oxen went almost mad. The boys struggled and hung on to them. They had a rough time,

AFRICA CALLING

did those boys. Struggling oxen can be the very devil to hold.

Further, the heat of the flames from the fire-break was terrific. We had to shield our faces with our hands. Sparks and bits of flaming grass flew in all directions, even, by some freakishness, flying back against the wind on to us.

Meanwhile the great grass fire was sweeping along, roaring and leaping. Some of the flames shot yards into the air. It was like the advance of some huge, wide, devouring monster. Great tongues of advancing flames flung themselves into the grass and licked it into nothingness. The heat was terrible. Our fire-break was growing larger with every second, but in the face of that advancing devouring monster it seemed a poor little defence. It looked as if the great fire would have no difficulty in leaping across the burned space of our break and reaching us.

The oxen were bellowing worse than ever, and struggling. The boys shouted and cursed. It was easy to become unstrung. I heard one of my mates cry out, "God damn the gold rush!" and I cried out, "God damn it!" too. It was a moment of high crisis. One of the oxen had flung himself down, and flying sparks had set the canvas top of the wagon smouldering in two places.

Then suddenly we became aware that the heat was diminishing. The great fire had reached the edge of our fire-break; and that part of it was promptly extinguishing itself from lack of fuel. The main body of the fire went off on its devouring way, leaving us in the midst of a bare, blackened, and smouldering waste, a

GOLD STRIKE

hot, singed, and smoke-blackened party, who extinguished the smouldering wagon-top and wearily prepared to resume their way, feeling that they had had just about enough of things, and rapidly reaching the point when they didn't care whether they got to the field before the Nairobi rush or not.

But the end of the journey was near now. A few hours later we arrived at the outer limit of the fields, and at once our flagging spirits revived.

There was no sign of the Nairobi people. The only man there was an old prospector who had been poking about the creeks and gullies of the neighbourhood for years. He had staked out his claim, and as we came up was squatting on his haunches at the entrance to his tent, panning off a sample of gold from some quartz that he had crushed in a hand 'dolly.'

He grunted disapprovingly as he saw us. "Bloody clerks and counter-jumpers from Nairobi!" he said.

He was an odd-looking man, with red-rimmed eyes, very cleanly shaven, but with red hair, long and lank, that hung down his cheeks, like a sort of freak wig. There was a bitter look about him. We told him that we were not "clerks from Nairobi," or from Nairobi at all, or from any other place of civilization and suburbs, but bushmen—the same as he was. After that we got on well with him. He told us which were the best parts of the field, and gave us valuable tips about prospecting and staking out claims. We drank it all in, feeling very happy about things, and telling ourselves that the difficult journey from Londiani had been well worth it.

In our excitement we paid little heed to the very

AFRICA CALLING

important fact that the journey had been so protracted that we had very little rations left with which to carry on the work of prospecting and staking out claims. At the moment it was enough for us to know that we had beaten the crowd from Nairobi.

CHAPTER II

A PURSUIT

WE made our camp at a spot on the Kuja river, seven or eight miles from the queer red-haired prospector's place, staked out a large area, and promptly got to work prospecting. The field was a reef proposition, and we planned that when we had found a payable reef we should interest a company in it. Our method of prospecting was to pan the gullies and streams for traces of alluvial gold, follow these traces upstream till they stopped, then search the sides of the gully or stream for bits of loose quartz from which the gold had come, and follow the trail of the quartz up the hill till it ended, which meant that we were over the reef. After that it was a matter of setting the boys to dig trenches, to intercept the gold leaders which fed the reef. It was exciting work, for, verily, we never knew what a day's labour might not bring forth in the way of a fortune.

But our small supply of rations was rapidly dwindling, and we soon reached the point when something had to be done about it. If we had had sufficient money it would not have troubled us long. Only twenty miles away was a place called Karungu, one of the ports on Lake Victoria, where there was an Indian store at which we could have purchased everything we needed. But all the money we had was an insignificant trifle, and in the end it was decided that I should go back to Londiani,

report to our Indian grubstaker the favourable prospects of the field, and how we had staked out a large area, and see if he could supply us with more rations.

Accordingly one morning I set off—on foot. There was a steamer service from Karungu right to the railway that ran through Londiani on its way to Nairobi, but there was no steamer for nearly a week, and I could not wait. For the reason that a man on foot can travel very much faster than oxen, I did not take the wagon. I wanted to get to Londiani and back as quickly as ever I could; although we had staked out a large area, we wanted to examine as much as possible of the field before the rush from Nairobi arrived.

Carrying only blanket and rifle, I set forth. It proved to be a journey I should not like to repeat. The length of it was 215 miles, made up of ninety-five miles on foot, forty miles by an Arab dhow along the Kavirondo Gulf, then eighty miles in a goods train, which I 'jumped.' The foot miles were the worst. So short were rations that the first day I covered forty-three miles without a single thing to eat, except a little tea. I then reached a little town called Kisii, and obtained a small quantity of food, which helped me along the second day's march—one of twenty-seven miles. The third day I covered twenty-five miles.

My boots—cheap to begin with—were now falling to bits, and I had to lash the soles to the uppers with strips of handkerchief. My ankles were sore from continual irritation of spear-grass seeds. I was in a lovely mess, and it was with great relief that at last I found myself lying at my ease on the deck of the Arab dhow,

whose captain had very obligingly given me a passage. I don't know that I've ever had such a sense of luxury as when I lay there, all through an evening, with the gentle breeze of the lake fanning me, and the stars soft and clear away above the curving sail. I was sorry when the end of that part of the journey came. I had no difficulty in 'jumping' the goods train, according to plan, and so at last came to Londiani.

But now a difficulty arose. Our Indian grubstaker was quite willing to advance us all the rations we needed, but he was hard up and couldn't afford it. He could let us have only a small portion of the goods.

"I am ver' sorry, please," he said in his Babu English, genuinely distressed, and we got down to discussing a way out of the difficulty. The thought of my two mates at the goldfield, with their scanty rations getting scantier every day, decided me: I must go on to Nairobi. The Indian provided the train fare. I was to offer shares in our undertaking in return for sufficient money to purchase the goods we needed. The gold fever was raging, and my Indian friend prophesied that it would be easy to get the money at Nairobi—"I am thinking not you will have any trouble," was how he put it as I left.

This prophecy proved accurate, for within three days I was back at Londiani with all the stores I needed. In order to get them I had taken six more shareholders into our little syndicate, which, with my two mates, the Indian, and myself, raised the total to ten. It went much against the grain to have to share our possible profits thus with so many sleeping partners, but there was nothing else for it.

AFRICA CALLING

It was pleasing, though, to be able to raise the money so quickly. Nairobi, as I have said, was well in the grip of the gold fever. I heard that a huge number of people were taking part in the rush to the field, all sorts of people, from clerks to lounge lizards, going in cars, motor-trucks, on foot, any way and every way, with very few of them knowing anything of the tremendous difficulties of the long journey before them. There were numerous accounts of people giving up or collapsing on the road. The journey to that goldfield was not one for town-dwellers such as these folk were.

At Londiani I prepared for the journey back to the goldfield, which was to be by train to Kisumu—the railway terminus at the Kavirondo Gulf—thence by an Arab dhow down the gulf, and along the coast of Lake Victoria proper to Karungu, the lake port which was only about twenty miles from our goldfield camp. I planned to get porters at Karungu to carry the goods those last twenty miles.

But just as I was ready to start one of the mates whom I had left on the goldfield turned up. He had come from the goldfield by way of the steamer from the port on Lake Victoria, then by train. Not knowing whether I got through or not, and the rations being almost completely exhausted, my two mates had decided that one of them should go to Londiani and find out what had happened, while the other remained at the field and held the fort, so to speak.

My mate was very much relieved to find me with the stores all ready, and we lost no time in getting away.

Now, with the gold fever raging as it was, my movements had been of considerable interest to numbers of

Nairobi people. Wild rumours flew about that we had struck it very rich, and two men in particular made various attempts to worm out of me the exact location of our claim. People who ordinarily are well balanced enough completely lose their heads when the gold fever gets them, and when these two men failed to find out from me where our claim was they decided to follow me. They did it quite cleverly, and it was not till my mate and I, with the stores, were at the port of Kisumu that we discovered what they were up to.

We had found a dhow bound for Karungu, and had booked passages and seen our goods placed on board. There were numbers of dhows huddled about the jetty, and to get to ours we had to cross the decks of several others. While doing so we caught the sound of European voices from the hold of one of the dhows, and recognized them as those of the two Nairobi men. Though we couldn't hear all they said, we heard enough to guess that they were bargaining with the captain of the dhow to follow our craft—which was all very melodramatic and silly, but quite in keeping with the gold hysteria with which every one was infected. Without saying a word, my companion and I continued quietly across the dhows to our own vessel, and soon the half-moon sail was hoisted and we were away.

Five minutes later, as we moved off down the gulf, the other dhow wormed its way out of the craft clustered about the jetty, and its sail went up. The pursuit was on!

It was late afternoon, with a breeze that just rippled the water, and our dhow slipped along easily. We were sailing right down the centre of the gulf, which here

AFRICA CALLING

was about twenty miles wide, and the other dhow kept right in our wake. She leaked rather badly—every now and then we caught sight of the bailer at work—but she sailed well enough. We regarded her with great interest, and the figures of the two Nairobi men which, with our Arab captain's binoculars, we could see sitting on the deck.

The thing was no joke. We didn't want them to find out where we were going. Until we had made a proper examination of the field, and definitely decided upon the best part, the fewer strangers around the better. It was up to us to devise some way of giving them the slip. As it was, we should have all our work cut out to decide on our claim before the great Nairobi rush arrived.

Mile after mile we sailed on down the gulf, with the other dhow following persistently. That we should not be able to outsail her, and so lose her, was clear, for she was gradually creeping up, and by sundown had considerably lessened the distance between us. Our Arab captain, noting our interest, asked what was wrong. He was a tall, gaunt person, with a small fez, that stayed on his head only by a miracle, and a nose that had a sort of wrinkled-up twist which made him look as though he were continually smelling something unpleasant. He suggested that we were escaping from somebody—the police perhaps.

We managed to convince him that it was not the police, and told him roughly the position of the gold-field, and how we desired to get there without the two white men in the other dhow being able to follow us.

The captain considered awhile, and announced that

A PURSUIT

for a trifle of baksheesh it might be managed. We promised him the baksheesh, and he explained that instead of going right on into Lake Victoria proper, and on to the port of Karungu, as arranged, he could land us at a place called Homa Bay, some little distance farther down the gulf.

At Homa Bay, he said, we could obtain carts to take us to the goldfield, which was straight across-country and not a very long way. He could land us at Homa Bay under cover of the darkness, and immediately resume his course, and the other dhow, not knowing that we whites were no longer on board, would follow him all through the night and the next day, right to the port of Karungu.

"Not till then will they discover their mistake," said the Arab in Swahili, bowing. "Truly, it is a clever plan, and worth much baksheesh." He was clearly sorry he had not asked more at the beginning.

"Very clever," said my companion, "except that it doesn't look as if there's going to be much darkness to-night." He pointed to the horizon, where the moon was just coming up, full and clear, into a sky in which was not a shred of cloud. "Those fellows will see us land at Homa Bay as clearly as if it was broad day."

That certainly looked like the end of the Arab's plan, and we ate our evening meal on deck feeling far from happy about things.

Up came the moon, more and more revealing and betraying. The sail of the other dhow, though two or three miles astern of us, was quite clear. The gulf was not so wide here, and trees and details of the land were

visible, especially on our left hand, which was the side nearest to us.

About ten o'clock, however, a change took place. The wind died down, and low on the horizon a heavy bank of cloud appeared. This bank rose and spread, and presently the wind came again—a smart, blustering wind, full of driving rain. Like most inland seas, Lake Victoria is subject to sudden storms, and this was a fair sample of one. The rain-filled wind fairly pelted us, the hitherto smooth water became a considerable seaway, the dhow began to rock, and the brightness of the moon was lost behind the clouds.

Actually, however, it was nothing very serious, and the dhow could have gone on her way comfortably enough; but the Arab saw that here was his opportunity of obtaining, after all, the baksheesh spoken of earlier in the proceedings. The attitude of that Arab to the dirty weather was that if it assisted him in the obtaining of baksheesh it was a very friendly thing. At this rate of sailing, he said, we should be opposite Homa Bay in less than an hour, and, in the greatly diminished visibility, landing us unseen and immediately resuming his course would be easy.

It worked out exactly like that. About eleven o'clock the Arab swung the dhow sharply in to the left, and presently a jetty showed through the rain, and some scattered buildings behind it.

The dhow quietly lay alongside, and all hands set to work unloading our goods. A few minutes later the Arab was given his baksheesh and the dhow was away again, leaving us two whites on the jetty, with our goods covered with pieces of sacking to keep off the rain.

A PURSUIT

We watched the dhow disappear; but very soon afterwards the rain ceased, and the moon came out, and we saw the dhow again. The craft was lying straight on her course down the gulf as if nothing had happened, and the dhow containing the two Nairobi men was following dutifully a couple of miles behind. We had done the trick!

Leaving my mate on the jetty to look after the goods, I went up to the few scattered buildings to see about getting a couple of small ox-carts with which to continue our journey, according to plan. The buildings were merely grass-roofed huts, with an Indian store as the largest. No one was about; the whole place was asleep; and I went up and kicked on the door of the Indian store.

For a time there was no answer. Then, as I kicked again, I called loudly, "*Mimi mzungu! Mimi mzungu!*"¹ Presently there was a sound of movement within, and after much creaking of ill-fitted bolts the door opened a little way, and an Indian face peered out, and I saw that an Indian hand was firmly clutching an iron bar. In quiet little spots like this there had been several instances of robbers pretending to be white men, and thus gaining an entrance into Indian stores, and this man was taking no chance.

I explained what I wanted, and a prolonged argument followed. It was impossible, said the Indian, to get carts at that time of night, and I had better wait till morning.

But I couldn't wait. Apart from our desire to get all our claim-staking done before others arrived at the

¹ "I am a white man! I am a white man!"

AFRICA CALLING

goldfield, there was the fact that our lone mate there would now be very short of rations indeed.

I insisted that I must have the carts that night, and at last the Indian agreed to get them for me—at a price much higher than ordinary rates.

Together he and I knocked up some natives in their huts at the back of the store—a process which involved much calling by us of “*Hodi! Hodi!*” which meant “Ho, there within!” At length came the answer, “*Karibu!*” which meant “Near!” or “I am coming.” Two carts, called Hamali carts, were brought forth, a pair of oxen harnessed to each. Our goods were then brought from the jetty and loaded, and away we went.

Right through the night we jolted along over a road that got worse with every mile, and at sunrise reached a small village called Mirogi. We then sent the carts back, for it was only to this spot that we had contracted with the Indian for them to bring us, the road from here on being totally unfit for wheeled traffic. We continued the journey with a long string of porters.

It was rough country, but we forced the porters along. By getting off the dhow at Homa Bay we were certainly making a short cut to the goldfield, and we hoped to reach our camp that night. But it was not to be. Towards sundown, when only five miles from the field, we encountered a terrible hailstorm.

It was not just ordinary hail that comes pelting down. This hail came driving almost parallel with the ground. It flung straight into our faces. Its force was tremendous. The stones cut our faces, and we had to shield ourselves with our hands and arms. Thousands

A PURSUIT

of the stones were more than half an inch thick; they were the largest hailstones any of us had seen. They threshed the trees of their leaves and broke off twigs and large branches.

It was impossible to go on, and it was with great relief that we spotted a deserted hut a little way off the road.

We made to run to it, but our natives tried to prevent us. The hut was deserted because a man had died in it, cried their leader, his head down and sideways to the beating of the hail. No native would willingly enter a hut where some one had died. It had to be left to the ghost of the dead person, and great misfortune would befall those who intruded on the ghost.

It sounded most impressive and fearsome, but we should have risked a whole company of ghosts in return for shelter from that hail, and we ran over to the hut and dashed in through the doorless doorway. Our natives brought up their loads and dumped them at the door, and we dragged the goods inside. The natives then sought shelter behind trees and bushes.

It was a small hut of mud and wattle, with a thatched roof, one main room, and a smaller leading off it. There was no window; what light there was came in through the doorway. It had a nasty, stale smell, as from lack of ventilation. Remains of crude furniture lay about—a broken bunk of sorts, a slab table with a leg missing—a half of a blanket, and some pieces of rag that, no doubt, had been part of a loin-cloth. In the ashes of a cooking place were an enamelled pannikin and a water-gourd. Rather than deserted, the place looked as though its owner had left it hurriedly while

AFRICA CALLING

fully expecting to return. In the failing light it was very eerie.

The storm raged on, and at last even the natives were compelled to seek the shelter of the hut. It became obvious that, with the creeks and other streams all flooded, there was no reaching the field that night. We decided to stay where we were until morning.

And what a queer night it was! The hail ceased, but a heavy driving rain took its place, making a sound on the thatched roof like a multitude of voices bidding us hush. We didn't need any such bidding. The natives huddled about the floor without saying a word, except in low whispers. Some one had produced a hurricane lantern, and its half-light seemed only to make the eeriness more intense. Almost our only movements were when my mate or I lit a pipe or cigarette, or when one or other of the natives took a pinch of native snuff—a rather dreadful mixture of pepper, tobacco, and powdered cow-dung. From the thatch of the roof a plague rat blinked down at us.

But my mate and I had been up all night the previous night, and we slept well enough, and the next I knew it was daylight, the rain had ceased, and the natives were out of the hut and preparing breakfast. They were very quiet. "Well, entering that hut didn't do us any harm after all," I said jocularly to the leader of the natives.

A look of great fear came into the man's face. "*Bwana*,¹ you slept?" he said. "You did not see?"

"See what?" I asked.

But he would not answer, neither would any of the

¹ 'Master'

A PURSUIT

others inform us what it was that they had seen. All we could get from them was that through going to sleep we had been spared a most distressing and unnerving sight. Whether they saw the ghost of the dead owner of the hut I do not know. They might have imagined it. The atmosphere of the place was certainly conducive to imaginative activity. I am glad to say, though, that no evil thing seemed to happen to them as a result of their experience.

After waiting awhile to give the flooded creeks time to go down somewhat we started off, and soon after midday arrived at our camp. Our mate greeted us with the news that he had found indications of a really first-class gold leader, and that we had just come in the nick of time, as he was starting on the last of his rations that day.

He also told us that the great rush from Nairobi had arrived, and consisted of—half a dozen men! The rest had given up during the various stages of the long and difficult journey. It was, as I have said, no sort of travelling for town-dwellers, and there had not been really much call for our strenuous efforts to forestall them.

As for the two Nairobi men who had followed us, they turned up four days later, weary, footsore, and with a tale of woe. Thinking that we were still on board, they had followed our dhow right out of the Kavirondo Gulf into Lake Victoria proper, and down along the coast almost to Karungu, the port nearest to our goldfield camp. Then the leak in their dhow, which had bothered them all the way, suddenly opened right up, and their captain was compelled to run the vessel

AFRICA CALLING

to the bank. They just managed to scramble on to the land as the dhow sank. They then tramped across-country to the field, having learned its location from natives at Karungu.

I must say they were stickers! But they had no rations, money, or tools—everything had been lost in the sinking of the dhow—and could not remain at the field. We succoured them to the extent of giving them rations for the tramp back to Karungu and money for the steamer and train fare back home. Thus ended the great Nairobi pursuit!

CHAPTER III

LONE CAMP

WE sent back to Londiani the wagon and eight oxen which had originally carried us to the goldfield, now having no use for them. Then we got down to work in earnest, pegging out claims, running lines of 'bluff pegs' in order to conceal the position of our valuable areas, and trenching round and about the indications of a good leader which our mate had discovered while we were away. We were all enthusiasm and energy, and full of ideas of the large fortunes that we were going to make.

But the course of affairs did not run smoothly for very long. First, the boys whom we had sent off to Londiani with the wagon returned with the news that they had not been able to get there, and that the wagon was a wreck somewhere along the road. A herd of elephant had come on them one evening just after they had outspanned, and it was only by prompt flight that they escaped with their lives. When the elephant were gone and the boys returned to the camping place they found that the elephant had taken the wheels off the wagon and smashed them against trees! It looked as though they had a real objection to wheeled traffic in the bush. Perhaps they were the same herd of elephant that had torn down the bridge over that swamp whose crossing had given us so much trouble on the way to the field!

AFRICA CALLING

Next we found that this goldfield country was very unhealthy. First one of my mates was taken ill with fever, then the other. At the beginning we thought the attacks were not very serious, but with their constant repetition we had to reconsider the matter. Quinine we had in plenty, and in plenty we took it, but the fever recurred just the same. One of the sick men became so ill that we had to take him to the lake port and send him home on the steamer for treatment.

For a while the two of us carried on, then the second man became so ill that he too had to leave the field. This meant that, except for my natives, I was alone on the claim, with my nearest white neighbour a prospector some seven miles away, and the bridgeless, crocodile-infested Kuja river in between. For nine months I lived thus.

But they were not dull or empty months. There was always something happening. One of my earliest experiences after my companions had left was labour trouble. A diary that I kept at the time has the following entry:

Nearly had mutiny among the boys this morning. One, named Unyango, threw down his tools and refused to work. Said he had not been used to digging holes in the ground. On my ordering him to resume he made an insolent reply. Could see things were critical. I was surrounded by scowling faces and mutinous mutterings. Felt very much alone. I made my foreman catch Unyango and hold him down on the ground on his face; then I gave him ten lashes of my rhino whip. Didn't have much effect. Unyango even more insolent; so I saw him off the premises with my rifle, and dared him to come back. Very high-handed, of course, but it settled the affair. Unyango knew he would have to face

LONE CAMP

starvation and the terrors of night alone in the bush if he didn't give in to me. So in a little he returned, fairly groveling to be taken back. I contented myself with cutting his pay and kicking his black posterior hard several times. As a result, the tone of the labour is much elevated, and we got through a very respectable amount of work to-day.

There were plenty of lion, rhino, and leopard all about, and every night numbers of hippo came up out of the river and wandered about the region of the claim and camp. Many a night from my tent I saw a dozen or more of these great beasts at a time, feeding and nosing about in the moonlight. They looked remarkably tame and inoffensive, but weren't. It was just that normally this region was not inhabited by mankind, and the hippo were accustomed to having it to themselves.

One night I awoke to find one of them at the door of the tent. He was a large beast, and his great head almost completely filled the doorway. He was sniffing inquisitively. He gave forth a strong piggy odour, and of mud and damp weeds.

It was like waking up to some particularly horrifying kind of nightmare, and only with difficulty I refrained from a yell of alarm. Absolutely the thing for me was to keep quiet.

There for a moment the hippo stood sniffing in the doorway. Far off a lion roared, and from nearer at hand came the light clatter of a herd of wildebeest. The hippo pushed his head in a tiny bit farther. The wind was the wrong way for him to scent me. He was heavily curious rather than hostile, but the situation was dangerous enough for all that. With the utmost

caution I slid out my hand to my rifle, leaning against the bunk. The movement was stealth itself. The hippo's monstrous snout was only a yard from the foot of the bunk.

My fingers closed about the rifle, and inch by inch I brought it closer. The night seemed very quiet all at once: the lion was silent, and there was no longer any clattering of wildebeest. There seemed to be nothing in the world except the hippopotamus and myself.

I am not one of those great, grand heroes who laugh at danger. Lying there, with that mighty pig-like snout in the doorway, I was just about as nervous and tense as possible. I was aware of every aspect and detail of the beast, even of every breath he took. It was the sort of awareness every man should have who has anything to do with wild big game; the man who *knows* all the dangers has a much better chance of escaping them than he who, however heroically, plunges in ignorant of them. The nervous, keyed-up big-game hunter is the hunter who lives longest.

I got the rifle into the bunk, and prepared to work myself into a position from which, if need be, I could fire. Then, to my intense relief, I saw that the hippo was, very casually, backing away. But the relief was short-lived. The hippo was further investigating this strange erection called a tent. He was wandering round the side of it—and blundering over the guy-ropes and pegs. First one peg came up, then another and another, and one side of the tent sagged down on me. I sprang up, but before I could reach the door the whole of the tent came down, enveloping me completely.

LONE CAMP

With the hippo's great feet blundering all over the place it was likely enough that he would trample on me. To be trampled on by two or more tons of hippopotamus would be no joke. They came very close to me, those tons. Once they brushed me through the canvas, as the animal's great, smelly body lumbered by. At last I squirmed out from under the canvas. The hippo was just moving off. He had not seen me, and I watched him go rolling down towards the river, glad beyond measure to see the last of him.

The whole affair, from the moment I awoke to find him in the doorway, right till at last I extricated myself from the fallen tent, had taken only a few seconds, but they were seconds that could not have been fuller.

Another experience with a hippo happened only a few days later. One early morning some of my boys came running to tell me that they had trapped a baby hippo—hippo flesh was one of their favourite foods—but that the mother hippo wouldn't let them get near it.

Taking a revolver, I went along, and found the baby hippo in a small pit that had been dug in a path used by the hippos in going to and from the river. The boys had dug the pit the previous afternoon, and covered it lightly with bushes and leaves. This pit, meant for baby hippo only, was all the trap there was.

But nothing more was needed. Behind its construction was understanding and knowledge of the habits of hippos. On coming up from the river for the nightly grazing a mother hippo always made her young one precede her along the path. This was so that she could see it did not stray or lag behind. Should the young one

AFRICA CALLING

halt on the path, or move too slowly, the mother was right there behind it to butt it gently forward.

The boys had dug the pit in a narrow part of the path, and it was easy to picture the baby hippo halting suspiciously as he came up to the spread of bushes that concealed it. But his mother, unable because of the narrowness of the path to see past him to what had caused the halt, butted the young one forward—on to the treacherous spread of bushes, sending him crashing through them into the pit, which was of such depth that he could not climb out of it. The boys then came and speared the animal to death. There was something repulsively cruel and harsh about a trap worked by such methods, and during my stay at the goldfield I did all I could to stop the practice.

On this occasion the mother hippo was very determined not to let these human enemies get her young one whom they had slain. I found her standing guard over the pit—a creature prepared to do battle. There is normally nothing very beautiful about a hippo, but to me that mother hippo standing guard there over her dead young was an example of heroic mother-love. But she didn't sense this sympathy I had for her. As I came up, clad in white pyjamas, she lowered her great head and came charging. I dodged behind a bush, and she lumbered past, turned, and came at me again. I ran round the bush, and she lumbered round after me. But I could take the corners far more quickly than she, and it was easy to keep ahead. Still, grunting, snorting, she came after me; and it was only when, running so quickly I was able to get behind her and put a shot from the revolver into the thicker part of her rump,

LONE CAMP

that at last she went lumbering off. The thing was getting far too strenuous, and I had to end it somehow. In her thick hide the revolver shot would not inconvenience her for long.

Rhino were a greater danger to us, however, than hippo—especially one old bull that frequented a patch of bush near the claim. This old chap seemed to have a strong objection to the sound of blasting. Almost every time that we fired a dynamite charge in the course of our work he would dash out of the bushes, and go snorting across to another patch of bush. He had about him a what-the-hell's-all-this air, exactly as though the explosion had waked him out of a sound sleep, and he was thoroughly angry about it.

When blasting we all stood back, clear of any bits of rock thrown up by the dynamite, but at sight of the rhino we instantly dropped down into the trenches. On one occasion the snorting, startled rhino thundered so close to a trench in which two of the boys were thus hiding that his feet kicked a lot of loose rubble down on them. They told me afterwards that the sound of him thundering up, and his shadow sweeping over them, was one of the most frightening experiences of their lives; they were sure the rhino was going to blunder into the trench on top of them. “Ee—*bwana*,” they cried; “but that part of the trench would then have been truly full!”

In the end, however, the blasting was too much for the old rhino, and he went off to some other part.

I was certainly kept busy on that goldfield. The original leader petered out, and there was a fine old game of digging trenches to find another one. All day

AFRICA CALLING

long did I keep my boys at it, trenching, trenching, trenching, in the hope of cutting across one of these lines of gold-bearing stone.

Trailing a gold strike is the most heartbreaking kind of trailing there is, in my opinion. I was getting pretty experienced at it now, but I was always being led off on false scents. Time and again I thought I had found it, only to discover that it was a 'pocket' which didn't lead anywhere, and in itself of little value. There is an old joke, common on goldfields, which runs, "The field is made of gold—and other things; mostly other things." The "other things" were certainly abundant at this field!

But I kept at it. The chief characteristic about trailing gold is that one keeps at it. The persistence with which an out-of-luck roulette-player will keep on playing is as nothing compared with the way a prospector will put up with all sorts of discomforts and distresses, and continue to toil and sweat in the search for payable gold.

Actually there are many metals far more profitable to prospect and work than gold—tin, copper, galena, wolfram, for example—and gold prospectors know this quite well; but gold has a lure which the others have not. It is like a lust; it will not stand the light of reason, but is attractive just the same.

I certainly put up with plenty of discomforts and distresses there on that Equatorial African goldfield. There were jigger fleas. Jigger fleas are particularly unpleasant insects that frequent the ground of one's camp, get on to one's feet, and burrow in under one's toenails and lay their eggs there. This makes the toe

frightfully sore and itchy, and one has to get down to it and dig out the eggs, thereby leaving a hole, which one treats as best one can; in my case I put match-heads in it, and paraffin—both good antiseptics.

These jigger fleas were a constant annoyance, and it was easy to be laid up for days with a sore foot because of them. I tried squirting paraffin on the ground in my tent, and on the earth floor of a house which I built for myself later, but without much success. They were temporarily discouraged, however, by my setting fire to the paraffin on the floor; but, because of the grave risk of setting the whole show on fire, this was a procedure which I did not care to repeat; wherefore the jigger fleas were soon back in full force. There was nothing to do but put up with them.

There were plague rats, too, that lived in the grass roof of the house and refused to be dislodged—large, obscene-looking creatures that looked down at me with their wicked little eyes, and made scurrying noises in the night, and more than once drove me to shooting at them up there in the roof, and risking the shot setting the house on fire.

There was a night when one of them bit my foot through the mosquito-net—an experience which so shocked me that for the rest of the night I could not sleep, but just sat up in bed, fearing the thing would come back, and at the same time keeping my revolver in my hand ready for him.

In the moment of awaking to the pain of the rat's teeth in my foot I had a quick glimpse of him through the mosquito-net, of his sharp, whiskered nose, long foreteeth, and lank body; it was a moment of plain,

stark horror. It is bad enough to be charged or mauled by animals—by lion, leopard, or what not—but to find a rat trying to eat one's self alive is an experience with an unpleasantness all its own.

There was the loneliness as well. I am not one of those people who are not happy unless they are in a crowd. Without being in the least anti-social I can live long spells without companions quite well. But that does not mean that there on that gold claim I did not want to talk with a white man occasionally. There were times when I thought meeting another white was about the biggest boon that could befall me.

My nearest neighbour, the man seven miles on the other side of the river, thought likewise. But the bridgeless river, with its dangerous rapids and crocodile-infested smooth-water sections, was a difficult barrier. More than once it happened that this man set out to visit me, but on reaching the river was unable to cross, and we had to confine ourselves to shouting to one another across the stream.

In the end we stretched a stout rope from bank to bank across one of the shallower parts, and by using this as a life-line and a support against the tremendous rush of the water we were able to cross most times when the river was not actually in flood.

Getting that rope across was no joke. As none of my boys would attempt it, I stripped and, holding the end of a light line—made up of bits of reins, ropes, and lengths of wild Sisal hemp and bush cane—started to swim across. I was swept downstream at a terrific rate, of course, and my boys ran down the bank shouting and yelling to keep off the crocodiles. In that swift

water there was no great danger from crocodiles; the trouble was that before I could get across I might be swept into a calm backwater, where the saurians abounded.

However, I struggled across safely at last, though a long way downstream from the place where I had entered the water. My boys then tied the real rope on to the makeshift one that I had taken across, and I hauled it over and made it fast to a tree. My boys then pulled the rope taut, and made their end fast. Our life-line was an accomplished fact.

Crossing, though, was always a precarious business. The water was waist-high most times, and a veritable torrent. My friend and I used to send one another presents occasionally—a leg of a buck or some camp-meat for the boys—and getting them across the river was a matter for all hands standing with backs firmly against the rope and passing the things from one to another. The least slip and away went the things, rolling and tumbling downstream to the calmer water where the crocodiles lay in wait. So great was the rush of the water that often it was as much as we could do to hang on ourselves, let alone pass goods along.

Once, as we were crossing in this way, two elderly native women, one of them carrying a goat, from one of the villages of the neighbourhood, appeared, and asked to be helped across. We could not be unchivalrous, though it looked anything but an easy task, so undertook to transport them.

The first lady was a heroine: as we stood there with our backs braced against the rope, and passed her from one to another, she merely kept her eyes tightly shut,

AFRICA CALLING

and let us pass her along as if she were a bag of sugar.

The second lady was a different proposition. She made fuss enough for a Channel crossing. She kicked and clung and cried out. She had taken off all her clothes and tied them in a bundle on top of her head, and was in great fear of losing them. She resolutely refused to be parted from the goat, which she held firmly in her arms.

Like the other woman, she had her eyes tightly shut, but kept her mouth open, and every now and then her loud screams were choked back by her shipping a lot of water. Added to this was the continual bleating of the goat. It was a fine mix-up!

Then suddenly she lost her grip on the goat, and the animal disappeared, still bleating, downstream to the waiting crocodiles. The lady had now reached the place where it was my turn to pass her on, and she was so overwrought by the whole thing that she refused to let me hand her to the next man, but wound her thin arms round my neck and her naked legs round my body, and would not let go.

As the whole line of men was rocking dangerously because of these contortions, there was only one thing to do, which was to submerge her. This I did, ducking her head well under, after which she was too busy spouting water to do anything else, and the passing of her to the bank was safely accomplished.

But the lady's unhappiness was not yet complete, for she now discovered that not only had she lost her goat, but also the bundle of clothes from the top of her head; and there on the bank she set up a loud wailing. I felt

sorry for her; none the less it was hard not to laugh at the spectacle of that naked black woman bewailing the loss of her clothes. There was something profoundly incongruous about it.

Having a means of crossing the river made a deal of difference to my lonely life. My neighbour and I visited one another pretty often. My neighbour was a bit of a character, and a visit to his camp was always an event. He had been born in Africa, and had never been out of it; but he liked to ape what he thought were the airs and graces of a city-bred man. He dressed for dinner. I have heard of lone traders in remote places of the South Seas dressing for dinner; but the reason my neighbour so dressed was far different from theirs.

Those South Seas men dressed in order to remind themselves of the civilization which they had left behind, and so that they would not become completely decivilized. My neighbour there on the goldfield dressed for dinner in order that he might get accustomed to it.

"I'm not going to stay in Africa all my life," he said to me once. "I am going to leave it one day, and live like a proper civilized man, in London or New York. I might as well have a bit of practice in the meantime."

I chaffed him about it, but he was in deadly earnest and was not to be put off. So far as I know he is still in Africa—still practising no doubt.

But in spite of having a neighbour I was rapidly tiring of the goldfield life. The claim was proving more and more to be one which could be worked profitably only by a company with a large capital: there was plenty of gold-bearing stone, but the per-

AFRICA CALLING

centage of its gold content was low. To attract the interest of large capital would be very difficult.

Then at last I was badly attacked by intermittent malaria—how badly I only knew weeks later at Londiani, when I was shown a report, of work done on the claim, which I had sent to my partners. The report was filled with references to little men in bowler hats sitting on trees round about the camp, and many other remarkable phenomena.

I think I am safe in saying that that report saved my life. Recognizing that I must have been delirious and very ill when I wrote it, one of my partners, who was now better of his fever, set out for the goldfield at once. He arrived to find me just about done; and it was only with the last of my strength that he was able to get me to the lake port, from where a steamer took me to Kisumu—to the railway that led to Nairobi, to doctors and nurses and all the civilized amenities, and at length to recovery.

CHAPTER IV

A MURDER—AND WORSE

I HAD had enough of mining, and I next took employment with a man who had contracted to clear, for maize-growing, some large areas of virgin bush in the Great Rift Valley. The contractor himself was in another part of the country, and I was in single-handed charge of about eighty native labourers, most of whom belonged to a tribe called the Wagishu.

Members of the Wagishu tribe were by no means the best of labourers. They were shifty and lazy. They had a reputation for cannibalism, two cases of which had been proved against them not very long before.

In one case they dug up, in the dead of night, the body of a girl that had been buried that day, roasting and eating it on the spot. In the other case a number of them lay in wait for an elderly native who was returning from a 'beer drink,' knocked him on the head, and deprived him of a rump steak before he was properly dead. The reason for this horrid deed, like the digging up of the girl, was meat-hunger. The perpetrators were eventually caught, tried, and hanged.

But Wagishu were all I had, and I had to make the best of them. It was not long before I had trouble.

One morning, when it was time to begin the day's work, my foremen (who were not Wagishu, but reliable

men of other tribes) reported that the Wagishu labourers had gone off to the District Commissioner—a distance of some fifteen miles—to complain that they had not received their wages.

This was the climax of a trouble that had been brewing for some time. That their wages were in arrears was quite true. The contractor was in difficulties. Even my own salary had not been paid. In this matter of no wages I was in full sympathy with the labourers. But I objected strongly to their having left their work thus without permission. I was their master, and for them to leave their work in this way was an impertinence. When a lone white man is in charge of a large number of natives there can be no half-measures about his relation to them. Either he is master or he is not.

Hence, when at last they returned from the Commissioner—incidentally, with a note asking me to do my best to get their wages for them—I was faced with the necessity of emphatically asserting my authority. How to do it at first I did not quite know. I was very much aware that I was but one man, while the Wagishu numbered sixty. I decided at last on a bold measure; it was a case that called for bold measures.

I had the whole of the Wagishu labourers come up to the clear space before my tent; and, seated in a canvas chair there in the open, with my four headmen behind me, I addressed them. I told them that I was entirely in sympathy with them for not having had their wages.

“This business of no money is bad,” is a rough translation of the way I put it to them. “Even I, your

master, have not had any wages for a long time. The big master who employs both you and me seems to have forgotten us. Truly it is a bad business! ”

For some time I went on in this vein, and from the natives came nods and cries of agreement. They were a motley crowd, ragged, and sweaty in the hot sunshine. Behind them were the areas that we had been clearing, with smoke from smouldering stumps and logs drifting on the wind.

“ That is truly true, *bwana!* ” cried a bow-legged, squat individual, badly cross-eyed, with a round face and numerous isolated tufts of whisker about his cheeks and chin. A ripple of agreement went through the crowd, growing noisier as it went, and at length bringing from one of my headmen—a big Nubian ex-sergeant of the King’s African Rifles—a growled command for silence.

They were quiet at once, and I continued my speech.

“ I am going to do my best to get you your money,” I told them. “ I will go to the farmers who own this land we are clearing, and ask them to pay the money for the clearing work to me, instead of sending it on to the big master who employs us, and seems to have forgotten us. I will then pay it to you.”

There was an outbreak of jubilant chatter at this. They all began telling one another that I was a good master—speaking with one eye on me, and loudly enough to make sure I heard. All kinds of scraps of what might be called sycophantic remarks floated over to me. “ I like working for him,” said one man. “ He is father and mother to us,” said another—a statement

which brought from one of the headmen behind me the sarcastic remark, "Impossible! Your father was a baboon!"

There was a great atmosphere of tension relieved. Stubs of cigarettes were brought forth from behind ears, and from holes in the lobes of ears, and all kinds of odd places in clothing, and lit from bits of glowing wood from a smouldering log near by, a process which, because of the extreme shortness of the stubs, involved much screwing up of faces. Others brought forth small leather bottles of native snuff and passed them round, or shook out some of the snuff on to the backs of their hands and offered it to one another. One man, in his excitement, took a far larger pinch of snuff than he had intended, and for the next three minutes went round coughing, spitting, and stamping, and wiping his streaming eyes with the back of his hand.

At last I held up my hand for silence, and the noise subsided.

"But that is not all," I said. "There is one other thing. Before I do anything to get you your money you have to be punished for putting me to shame."

There was an exclamation of astonishment at this, also dismay. They stood gaping at me. The bow-legged, cross-eyed man spat sideways, and turned and gazed at me with his mouth wide open.

"You left your work without my permission," I said. "For two whole days you have been away. The white men of the Government will think I am not a master at all. They will think I have no control over you. You have put shame upon me."

Hitherto I had been speaking quietly and evenly.

A MURDER—AND WORSE

Now I leaned forward in my chair and fairly roared at them: "Who is the master here—you or I?"

The suddenness of it startled them. One man, who was in the act of taking a drink of water from an old baking-powder tin, choked and spurted a lot of the liquid up over his face. Another dropped his leather snuff-bottle, its contents spilling.

"Who is the master?" I repeated.

The answer was a kind of scattered murmur:

"Why—you, *bwana*!"

I nodded agreement. "Yes—I am the master. I am glad you have that clear. Now, you can do one of two things. You can clear out—right away this moment if you like—and get your money as best you can from the big master, and I will get other men to take your places. You can do that, or stay here and I will get you your money as I have promised. But, first, each man will receive five strokes of the whip on the backside for insolence."

I then leaned back in my chair, thereby intimating that the decision was entirely in their own hands.

There was much shaking of heads. A groan of consternation went up. Scraps of remarks of a less flattering kind reached me.

"Ee, but he is a hard man, this!" was one of these remarks.

"He eats men for breakfast," was another—a peculiarly Swahili idiomatic expression for toughness.

Then there was a loud outbreak of chattering. They formed in groups, confusedly discussing the situation.

At last the bow-legged, cross-eyed man stepped out from the others, took off his blanket, which was his

only garment, and prepared to lie down on his face—to receive the beating. There was about his stepping out from the others an air of impatience, as if he had decided that there had been quite enough discussion, and that, anyway, the beating was cheap at the price. He carefully folded the blanket, to make a chin rest, and fastidiously dusted the ground on which he was to lie, removing any little bits of sticks and gravel; then, half humorously crying out, “*Mama yangu! Mama yangu!*”¹ he lay down on his face.

It only needed one to start it. The groups broke up immediately, and there was a general discarding of garments, and men began lying down all over the place. There was a great deal of banter, one asking another if his hide was tough, and the like.

I looked up at my Nubian headman and nodded, to indicate that he and his fellow-headmen now had charge of the affair. The four headmen stepped forward and, snapping out their commands, brought order into the business, making the Wagishu men lie down, not just anywhere, but in regular lines of fifteen each. After which they produced *kibokos*, or rhinoceros-hide whips, and set to work, one man to a line, giving each of the prostrate Wagishu five strokes.

It was a remarkable scene. Those sixty prostrate men looked like worshippers of some strange cult. Some of their naked bodies shone with sweat. There was surprisingly little noise—just the *whup, whup* of the whips and occasional grunts or half-stifled exclamations. Each whip stroke left a grey mark—of dust—for the whips were dusty and the bodies also.

¹ “Mother mine! Mother mine!”

It was soon over. On receiving his five strokes each man scrambled up, rubbing his buttocks, but remaining cheerful enough; there was about them an air of "Thank God that's over."

Here and there, stooping, they showed one another their stripes, or felt to see if the whips had drawn blood, which they hadn't.

One man, rubbing his buttocks, ruefully asked the particular headman who had whipped him if the headman had had anything specially against him that he should have brought the *kiboko* down so hard.

There was a general putting on of blankets and trousers, and the man who had dropped his snuff-bottle began scraping up the spilled snuff from the ground. Then I told them that if they looked behind the cook-house they would find a kongoni which I had shot that morning, and that they could have it for themselves. Overjoyed at the idea of free meat, they flocked to the cook-house, laughing and chattering, and I prepared to go to the owners of the land that we were clearing, and see about getting their wages, as promised—which money, as it turned out, I had no difficulty in obtaining. I gave a great sigh of relief that the thing had gone off so well—that the natives had taken it so good-humouredly. There had been moments when I did not know which way the affair would turn, and, though I did not show it, I was very apprehensive indeed.

My success was due to the respect which, deep down, the natives had for me, and to their own sense of justice. They knew that they had done wrong in leaving their work, and were willing to pay the penalty for it. According to the laws of the land, my action in

AFRICA CALLING

beating them was thoroughly illegal, but none of us bothered about that.

Some time later there was a disturbance of quite another kind. Late one Sunday afternoon a crowd of the Wagishu boys came running to me, crying that one of their number had been murdered.

They were tremendously excited, their eyes rolling, and all trying to speak at once. In rapid Swahili they said that they had been out for a walk, as they often did on Sundays, when there was no work to do—an innocent walk—and on their way back were attacked by a number of armed local natives of a tribe called the Kamasia. Outnumbered, the Wagishu boys fled, but the Kamasia captured one of them and speared him to death. And not only that, but they speared him in a very terrible way. They held him flat down on the ground on his back, and entered the spear in the region of the groin, driving it lengthways up through his body to his heart and beyond. This occurred on the bank of a small stream which formed one of the boundaries of the clearing, and the body was still there.

And, it appeared, it was all for no reason! “We were just returning peacefully home from a walk!” cried one of the Wagishu, as they stood there before me.

“Truly, the Kamasia are snakes’ bellies that they should set upon innocent people in this way!” cried another. These declarations of innocence did not impress me, however; I knew my Wagishu and their little ways, and guessed that they had been up to something.

I got my rifle and set off down to the small stream. The whole sixty of my Wagishu natives trailed along after me. They were armed with axes, broomsticks,

lumps of wood, and shouted all manner of threats—many of them appallingly indecent—of what they were going to do to the Kamasia people.

I saw that a very firm hand would be needed to prevent a wholesale slaughter; so on reaching the creek I turned and, letting them see that I held my rifle ready for quick action, forbade the Wagishu to cross. There was a murmur at this, but on my repeating the order they stopped, and stood about in glowering groups.

On the opposite side of the creek was a crowd of Kamasia warriors, a grim-looking lot, all with spears, swords, bows, and in a place by itself, near the water, lay the body of the dead man.

He was the most awful-looking dead man I have ever seen: every line of him expressed the terrible torture that had been his; his face was twisted up, his open eyes, over which flies were crawling, seemed to show pain in their dead depths, his arms were half raised with terrible stiffness and his fingers tightly clenched, and his legs were drawn up and distorted. The absolute horror of it fascinated me.

The Kamasia people made no move, but stayed there, squatted, watchful, and ready for whatever might happen. There was a set look about them; they appeared far more dangerous than the Wagishu men; many old warriors were among them.

But the Wagishu were not impressed. An outbreak of shouted threats came from them, and they brandished their weapons. One, then another, then a group, made to cross the stream. They were tremendously excited. At any moment there would be a concerted rush to cross the stream. A ripple of movement went

AFRICA CALLING

through the Kamasia warriors—a reaching forward for their spears stuck in the ground before them and a half-rising movement of their bodies.

I shouted "*Simama!*"¹ But in the noise they did not hear me. Whereupon I pressed the trigger of my rifle as I held it loosely under my arm, sending a bullet smacking into the water between the two tribes.

There was silence instantly. The sound of the shot was truly an imperative command.

"The first man that tries to cross gets a bullet in him!" I cried, and the Wagishu men moved back.

In the silence I turned to the Kamasia men, and, pointing to the corpse, asked, "Why did you do this?"

One of the older warriors stepped forward, and spoke thus:

"The Wagishu are hyenas. Always are they making trouble for us. They try to get at our women. When the women go to work in the fields the Wagishu creep upon them. Why, only two days ago they got the girl we call Swara! You have seen Swara perhaps. She is one of the girls who bring the milk to your camp every day. She is beautiful and young, with plump breasts. A desirable girl—yes! Many have wanted to buy her in marriage. Already her father has received goats and cows from a young man in part payment for her as a wife. Well, two days ago she came running home, crying that three Wagishu had assaulted her. They had taken it in turn to hold her down. A bad business! No doubt she will give birth to a Wagishu monkey."

He spat expressively. "Maybe that was a small thing; women are women; and we Kamasia are a

¹ "Stop!"

patient people. But when the Wagishu come and steal our beautiful goats—it is another matter! It is a fighting matter! And that is what they did! They stole our goats!”

His face was puckered with rage. “Oh, those Wagishu snakes and sons of snakes!” he cried. “Not just one goat, but six or seven! A couple of our small children were minding the goats, and about ten Wagishu men came up and chased them away, and drove off the goats before them. They were going to take them into some quiet place in the bush and cook and eat them. The Wagishu are always meat-hungry, like hyenas. The small children came running to us in the village with the story, and we warriors went in pursuit of the goat-stealing Wagishu, who scattered in confusion when they saw us. That is the story, *bwana*!”

I pointed to the corpse again. “But you caught *one* of them,” I said.

He gave me a quick look from the corner of his eyes, then said:

“Oh, that, *bwana*, was an accident. Yes—an accident. We were all round the Wagishu men, and one of them, in the confusion, ran on to one of our spears. Yes, that is how it was, *bwana*.”

There was a roar of protest from the Wagishu on the bank beside me and a general surging forward.

“*Mrongo! Mrongo!*”¹ they cried.

It was only when I switched the muzzle of my rifle in their direction that they subsided.

“Now,” I said, “the first thing you have all to do is to put down your weapons!” They hesitated, and I

¹ “Liar! Liar!”

repeated the order. "You Kamasia men," I said, "put your spears and swords in a heap on the bank. You Wagishu, put your weapons in a heap likewise on your side of the stream. Quickly now!"

They looked at me and at the rifle, then began to throw their weapons into a heap, as I had ordered, the Kamasia and Wagishu both. Two of the Kamasia men threw in their spears, but retained their short swords, and I was compelled to go up to them and draw the swords from the sheaths with my own hands and throw them into the heap. It was a high-handed procedure, ordering them to disarm like that, but a white man among natives is always in a peculiarly authoritative position. These natives obeyed me because my very presence took the matter out of their hands.

When they were all disarmed I called a *kiyama*, or council of the elders, comprising six men of each side, and ordered the rest to disperse. They went, slowly and unwillingly, with much halting and looking back. Some Kamasia women and children who had been watching from a hill-top near by came to meet their men and hear the news. Some of the departing Wagishu yelled an insult or two to the departing Kamasia.

The *kiyama* was quite short. The Wagishu elders repeated that their men had been out merely for an innocent walk, and that the warriors of the other tribe had caught one of them and held him down and speared him in the horrifying manner described.

The Kamasia elders repeated the story of the rape of the girl, the theft of the goats, and the man running accidentally on to the spear.

Each side stuck firmly to its statement, and in the

end I got out my notebook and wrote a brief report on their statements and what I knew of the case generally, tore it out, and gave it to the chief of the Wagishu, ordering him to take it to the District Commissioner, and the rest of his party to go with him.

Then I gave the chief of the Kamasia a note for the Commissioner, introducing him and the other elders, and sent the two parties off by different roads.

Four days later they returned, bringing me a letter from the commissioner who had heard the case. It was a cold, formal, and reproving document, headed with formidable reference numbers, and ran:

SIR,

I am in receipt of your two (undated) communications. I have gone fully into the matter, and have the honour to inform you that the findings of my inquiry are that the deceased met his end through accidentally running on to a spear.

The Kamasia natives have laid a complaint to me that you have confiscated certain of their property—to wit:

15 spears,
8 swords,
4 bows,
1 thumb-knife,
1 *finbo*.¹

The Kamasia natives inform me that you confiscated the above property in the most arbitrary manner, including intimidation by firearms. I shall be very much obliged if you will return them their property as described above forthwith.

I have the honour to remain,

Your obedient servant

.

Considering the pains and risks I had been at to prevent trouble between the two tribes, I felt very

¹ Walking-stick.

AFRICA CALLING

chilled by this communication. But there was a postscript that cheered me up immensely. It was in pencil, and was written, not by the Commissioner, but, apparently, by an assistant or some one who typed the letter. It ran:

That's what you get for being a bloody peacemaker—see!

I returned the Kamasia their weapons forthwith, and that was the end of the affair.

On the night of the *kiyama*, however, after I had seen the two parties of elders off on their separate ways to the Commissioner, I sent two of the Wagishu to guard the dead body of their speared fellow-tribesman where it lay on the bank of the small stream. I did this in case the Commissioner should send police or some one to make a report on the body and its exact position. The duty of the two watching Wagishu was to see that it was not disturbed—taken by hyenas, for example.

In the morning, however, when I went down to the stream, I found no sign of the two Wagishu watchmen, or of the body.

I found the two Wagishu in their huts, and they declared that they had watched the body for a portion of the night, but that the dead man's ghost appeared, and, scared, they ran away. When I told them the body had disappeared they said that, no doubt, hyenas had taken it.

There was something very unconvincing about their manner as they told me this, and I went back to the stream and examined the spot where the body had lain. If hyenas had taken it there would have been plenty of evidence of that fact—odds and ends of torn flesh

and bits of bone, and the ground all scratched. But there was no sign of anything like this. The dead man had vanished cleanly and bodily; all that remained to show that the corpse had ever been there at all were some masses of clotted blood from the spear wound.

I returned to the camp deep in thought. It was all very horrible, but the fact had to be faced that the Wagishu had a reputation for cannibalism. There was the proved case of the girl whose body they had dug up in the dead of night and roasted and eaten, and the proved case of their cutting off a piece of a man for eating before he was dead. In each case it was a matter of meat-hunger. Here on this clearing job meat had been rather scarce. The last meat they had had was the kongoni I had given them after the flogging affair, now a good many weeks ago. I had a most unpleasantly vivid mental picture of the whole of my sixty Wagishu labourers going down to the stream in the dead of night and carrying off the corpse.

Feeling more than a little sick, I began to enter their grass huts and examine them. The men were all out at work, and there was no one about. The huts were smelly little places, without bunks or furniture of any kind, but just the ashes of cooking fires in the centre and a few blankets and old clothes lying about. With a stick I poked carefully in the ashes of the fires, but without finding any traces of the dreadful feast I feared had taken place.

But some days later, when out hunting in a quiet part of the bush a mile or more from the clearing, I came across a portion of a roughly hacked human backbone with pieces of rib attached. It had been lightly buried,

AFRICA CALLING

and hyenas had scratched it up. The bones were charred, and near by I found the ashes of several fires. In these ashes were various other human bones. A suggestion by one of my headmen, who was with me, that the feast had been held out there in the bush in order that there might be little chance of its being interrupted, had all the air of a terrible truth.

CHAPTER V

THE DRUM

THE clearing contract finished, I found myself with a motor-truck, obtained in part payment of my wages, and decided to go in for carrying work. It was work that took me over widely separated parts of the country.

I transported native maize from the Nandi Escarpment, in Kenya, to the railhead at Lake Victoria, and cotton for ginning in various parts of Uganda. I carried mining stores from a port of Lake Albert to different mineral districts in the Belgian Congo. I even collected and transported all kinds of native curios—drums, execution knives, carved wooden figures, spears, buffalo hides, shields, mats, baskets, bead-work—for the tourist agencies at Nairobi and other places, for sale to visitors.

In connexion with this last-named activity I had a very curious experience. It was at a Uganda village near the Congo frontier, and as I drew up I heard, coming from a large thatched building in a compound on a hill-top near by, a rhythmic muttering of drums.

From one of the villagers, an intelligent middle-aged man in a long, loose white dress reaching to his ankles—a common garb in Uganda—and with a brown tarboosh on his head, I learned that the building was a *buisiro*, or tomb of a great chief, and that the drum-

beating went on continually, in accordance with an age-long custom.

It occurred to me that this would be just the sort of place where a valuable drum or two might be picked up; so, accompanied by the villager, I went up the hill and passed through a gate in the compound, which had in it a small number of living-huts. The large thatched building stood exactly in the centre, on the very crest of the hill. The drum-beating came from within it, and at these close quarters was no longer a mere muttering, but a booming throbbing that seemed to make the air quiver.

We went up to the high entrance of the building, which was beautifully decorated with woven papyrus-grass designs, and entered. There were no windows, and, after the strong glare of the sunlight, it was not for some moments that I could see anything. There was something very eerie about staring into the sound-filled darkness like that.

Then I made out the supporting pillars of the building, a large number of them, like a dim forest, and saw that in the middle of the floor the earth rose in a kind of mound. Then I discerned, back among the pillars, the shadowy shapes of the drummers. They numbered a dozen or more, and, except for one or two children, were all women.

A weird business, that drum-drum-drumming coming out from among those pillars! Now and again the sound faded, till it seemed not so much a lessened sound as a distant one; then it would come rolling back from that unreal distance and swell up into a reverberating roar.

“Ever since the chief died, which was before my

THE DRUM

father was born, drums have been beating for him here at his *busiro*," said my villager.

I went over to the nearest of the drummers. She was a very old woman, with a sunken face, toothless, and with skin tremendously wrinkled near the eyes. Her body was shrunken and thin, and her fingers, tapping the drum, were like cracked wooden sticks. Her drum was a fine instrument, shaped somewhat like a bowl, and standing to the height of a man's knees, and variously decorated. The skin of it was of finest ox-hide, and the wood was well seasoned with age and smoke-blackened. As a curio it was a valuable piece.

The old woman was rapping it with a curious alternation of the tips of her fingers and the heel of her palm, and now and then a kind of stroking movement which brought from the drum a rumbling sound. She looked up as I approached.

"That is a good drum, old one," I said, in Swahili. "I should like to buy it from you. How much will you take? "

She did not know very much Swahili, and looked inquiringly at the villager beside me. On his repeating my words the old woman shook her head, and, in a tongue that was a curious mixture of her own Luganda—the language of Uganda, of which I had picked up a little from time to time—and Swahili, she said that the drum was not for sale. Though she mumbled and droned the words she was quite determined about it. It was a drum, she said, that she was beating for the great chief. Though the chief had died a long time ago now, she was alive then, she said, a small girl, and her mother had beaten a drum in his *busiro*. When a

great chief died it was the custom for the women to beat drums in his *busiro*, beating them, always beating them, and when those women died other women took their place, and that is what she herself had done when her mother died. She could not sell the drum. She must keep it, to beat it for the great chief.

"A very great chief!" she went on in her mumbling way, stopping her drumming. As though by a common consent, the other drums beat softly. So great a chief, said the old woman, that he was almost a *kabaka*, or king.

"No," interrupted the villager beside me; "he was not a real *kabaka*. Not like Mutesa, for example, King of Uganda. Mutesa was a real *kabaka*. His *busiro* is at Kampala. Perhaps you have seen it, *bwana*? A wonderful *busiro* is that of Mutesa. It has a fence of spears, many of which are of gold and silver. There are flags and many beautiful things."

The old woman gave an impatient "T'chk!" It was clear that the *busiro* was her whole interest in life, and criticism of it about the only thing that could fire her.

"The treasures of Mutesa are all on the top of the ground!" she said, and looked at the mound in the middle of the *busiro*. "But we have things under the ground that Mutesa has not."

She gave a high cackle of oddly sinister laughter. "Under the ground!" she repeated. "Down underneath!"

My villager gave a snort of disapproval, but before he could speak the old woman entered on a defence of the chief whose tomb this was. Her speech was slow, broken, and mumbled, and at times it was very

THE DRUM

hard to follow her. What she said in effect, however, was that the chief was truly a great man. He was descended, she said, from Enfudu, the Great Tortoise, who overthrew Bemba, the Great Snake, who was the first *kabaka* of all. Bemba lived on Kitala Hill, near Victoria Nyanza—the groove in the rock where he slept is still there for anyone to see—and the way the Great Tortoise overthrew him was very clever. One very hot day the Great Snake and the Great Tortoise were talking, and the Snake said that he and all the other snakes became very tired on hot days like this.

“Oh,” said the Tortoise, “we tortoises do not get tired.”

“Why do you not get tired?” asked the Snake.

“We cut off our heads every night,” said the Tortoise; and called up a lot of tortoises and gave a command, and they all pulled their heads in under their shells.

“We do like that, and that makes us very strong,” said the Tortoise.

“I will do like that too,” said the Great Snake, and commanded that all the snakes should have their heads cut off, beginning with his own. So the snakes were all killed, and the Great Tortoise became the *kabaka*.

“It is true, old one, that Bemba, the Great Snake, was the first *kabaka*, and that he was overthrown by the clever Tortoise as you say,” said my villager. “But the chief who lies in this *busiro* was not of the line of *bakabaka*.”¹

The old woman gave an impatient tap and roll of her hand on the drum, and twitched up the ragged,

¹ Plural of *kabaka*

filthy, and scanty dress which was her only garment. She was very angry. The chief, she mumbled, was as wise as Enfudu the Great Tortoise was wise and clever! Once two neighbouring chiefs wanted to go to war with one another. What did this great chief do but call the two other chiefs to his court? There was a big feasting, and afterwards the great chief addressed them. He said war was bad, a business for fools. No one could profit by war. He had seen many wars. He remembered a war between two tribes, and famine came to those who were beaten. The crops had been destroyed, the cattle driven off, the young men who might have obtained food by hunting had been killed, and the strong young women taken off into captivity, so that there were none left to till the fields and raise fresh crops. Then, because of the famine, came plague, and the plague spread to the villages of those who had won the war, and soon their houses were filled with dead, and there was none to hunt or till the land, and they were in as bad a state of famine as the others. So both sides lost through the war. Which shows that war is bad, a business for fools. That was the way the great chief talked to those smaller chiefs, and at last they said he was right, and gave up their idea of going to war, and made friends.

“Were they not wise words of the great chief?” mumbled the old woman.

She then told how the chief had led his warriors against a secret society called the Bachich, who lived near the Congo border. The Bachich were people who dug up newly buried corpses and carried them to secret places in the forest, and chanted strange chants and

THE DRUM

went through strange ceremonies, and ate the brains, heart, and other parts of the bodies, so that they might partake of the swiftness, courage, and other qualities of the dead person.

"A bad people, *bwana*!" mouthed the old woman, shaking her almost hairless head. "But the great chief punished them."

Other illustrations she gave of the chief's wisdom and greatness, and might have gone on thus indefinitely had not the villager beside me interrupted and taken the affair into his own hands. The villager had no great love for the old chief. He was a modern native, who had had much contact with civilization, and had no patience with many of the ways of the past.

"No doubt he did these good things you speak of, old one!" he cried. "But what about other things he did? What about the sickness that came to him, and all that happened because of it?"

It was the sickness *tego*, or syphilis, he went on, and he got it from one of the local women. Among the local women there was much of the sickness; wherefore the chief obtained the women for his harem from far places—Nubia, for example. But this time he took a local woman, and the sickness came to him.

He called the witch-doctors, and they gave him medicine from roots and herbs, but without avail. They then made blood sacrifices with goats and sheep, and went through many ceremonies, but the sickness grew worse. Oh, it was a bad state that the chief was in! He drove the witch-doctors to greater and greater efforts, and did all that they told him. They told him that the only way to propitiate the devil who sent the

AFRICA CALLING

sickness was to kill the woman who had given it to him; and accordingly the chief had the head of the local woman struck off.

But the sickness merely grew worse, and the witch-doctors declared that the devil demanded that the heads of all the women of the harem be struck off, and their bodies thrown to the crocodiles in the lake. The chief was loath to do this, but at length it was done.

"He was a great chief!" the old woman with the drum mumbled at this point, nodding approval.

Ignoring her, the villager went on to say that, in spite of all these heroic measures, the sickness grew worse. The witch-doctors worked harder than ever, making their incantations and holding ceremonies night and day. The people mourned and grew sad. From being a big, strong, handsome man, the chief grew weak and haggard. In anger, he had certain of the witch-doctors cast to the crocodiles, and perhaps would have had them all destroyed thus if he had lived on much longer. Truly did this sickness of his bring much death and disaster to the tribes.

"That will show how great a chief he was!" mumbled the old woman, softly tapping the drum.

"He died at last," said the villager, "killed by the sickness, and this *busiro* was made ready for him. Oh, a bad business was the *busiro*! First a great pit was dug here on the top of the hill.

"That is the mouth of it there," continued the villager, pointing to the mound in the middle of the earthen floor. "Then," he went on, "the lesser chiefs went forth and brought up eight young girls——"

"They stripped them first," the old woman put in.

THE DRUM

"They were brought to the side of the pit," said the villager, "and their legs and arms were broken at the knees and elbows, so that they should not be able to struggle, and they were carried down into the pit and laid down side by side on their backs, thus covering the floor of the pit.

"Then the dead body of the chief was taken into the pit and stretched out, the bodies of the maidens making for him a living bed.

"Nor was that all, for eight youths were then brought to the edge of the grave, and their legs and arms broken; after which they were laid on top of the chief, to form a writhing coverlet. Then some oxhides, sewn together, were spread over the mouth of the grave and pegged down, and the beating of the drums, which was to continue for generations, was begun, and the building of the great thatched house."

"I was only a small girl then, but I remember hearing the cries coming from the pit," mouthed the old woman.

All of which happenings, said the villager, were according to the custom when a great ruler died. "A bad custom," he added, frowning.

The old woman disapproved that statement. "He was a great chief!" came her mumbled words.

The tips of her fingers brought a sharp *rat-tat-tat* from the side of the drum. "There are no chiefs like him now!"

She struck the drum sharply with the heel of her hand. The other drums, in the further recesses of the *busiro*, began to beat more loudly. The old woman held out an incredibly thin hand to me, begging.

AFRICA CALLING

"*Tumbaku!*"¹ she mouthed, and I gave her a sixpence. It was clear that I had no hope of buying the drum.

"For those who die now they do not beat drums at all!" mumbled the old woman, and with a curiously stroking movement of her hand brought a throbbingly deep rumbling note from the drum. Again and again she did this, then began steadily to beat, alternating the tips of her fingers with the heel of her palm. The other drums welled up in full strength. The half-darkness was filled with weird and rhythmic sound. With a glance at the mound—which was obviously hollow, merely earth so caked as to form a covering—I went out and away.

¹ "Tobacco!"

CHAPTER VI

A MAGICIAN

AT a small town in the Belgian Congo, not very far over the border from Uganda, I had a remarkable experience of black magic.

I had come to the town to obtain a permit from the Commissaire to enter certain Congo mining areas, where I hoped to get carrying employment for my motor-truck. The town was a straggled affair, right in the heart of the bush, with roads unmade and its scattered buildings mostly of wood. Darkness had fallen when I arrived, and the Commissaire's office was closed, and as it was too late conveniently to erect a camp, I left my two natives to sleep in the truck, while I went along to the only *café* in the place, to see if I could get a bed for the night.

The *café* was a miserable-looking place, small, ill-lit, and smelly, and I was curtly informed by the somewhat blowzy young Greek in charge that they had no accommodation for visitors.

I had a *sirop*, and was about to turn away when the young man, loath to lose the few francs which would be the price of the bed, said that the Greek master of the *café* was away for the night, and that I could have his room. I did not like the look of the place, but there was nothing else for it, and I accepted. After a drink and smoke with some of the tough-looking Greeks and others who were customers of the place

I went to my room, which was at the back of the building.

It was a small room, and, by the light of a hurricane lantern standing on a table in a corner, I saw that there were some queer ornaments on the wall. A small painted mask with remarkably evil-looking eyes was among them, and a human hand that had been severed at the wrist and dried and shrivelled to a quarter its normal size. There were, also, various little bags and packets that looked as though they contained powders.

Altogether they made an odd collection, not at all what one would expect in a white man's—a Greek's—house. But I did not give the matter very much attention: my day had been long and wearying, and soon I was under the mosquito-net and fast asleep.

A little later I awoke to the consciousness that I was not alone in the room. I had not extinguished the lantern, but turned it down, and in its low light I saw that a door which led out to what might be called the yard had opened. A figure came in. This figure was clad in white, and with curiously stealthy and uncertain movements came towards the bed. To my half-awake but none the less startled senses it looked like an apparition of some sort; then, as it came closer, I saw that it was a woman—a native or half-caste. She gave forth the native smell.

Neither moving nor making any sound, I watched her. I am no priggish moralist, but there was something about this affair I neither liked nor understood. Without being able specifically to define it, I was keenly aware of mystery. I remember wondering if some of the tough-looking Greeks and others whom I had seen

in the *café* were up to blackmailing mischief or something of the kind.

In her curiously stealthy and uncertain way the woman came right to the bed. She lifted the mosquito-net, and I saw that she was young and had long black hair. Standing there, she took off her white garment, which was a sort of kimono, and, naked, prepared to get into the bed.

But for me the affair had gone quite far enough. My feeling of unease had been heightened by the expression in the woman's eyes—a strange, hard staring.

I sat up, grasped her arms, and in Kingwana, a language very like Swahili, which was spoken by the natives of this region, asked, "Who are you?"

Perhaps it was my touch that did it, but the effect was immediate. Giving a little cry, the woman shrank back. Her hard stare vanished, and she looked about her in obvious surprise and distress. She snatched up her kimono, wrapped it round her, and, venting a mixed torrent of French and Kingwana, stepped back from under the mosquito-net. Rising, I followed and turned up the lamp.

In the improved light I saw that the woman was one of those indeterminate mixed breeds one finds so often in such parts of Africa—not just a half-caste, but one whose ancestry comprised all manner of breeds and half- and quarter-breeds. She was very good-looking, light-skinned, with dark eyes and regular features, and about seventeen years old.

"What is it all about?" I asked her. She looked round the room in a frightened way, and I saw that she

AFRICA CALLING

was trembling. She said something rapidly, brokenly, and agitatedly in French, edging the while towards the door. I gathered that she was in fear of being beaten by some one if she did not go at once. The next moment she was out through the doorway. I saw her swiftly cross the yard, slip through a gate, and disappear along the bush-edged road.

I got out my pipe, and for some time sat thinking and wondering about the affair, and finally decided that perhaps it was a case of sleep-walking, though that seemed a very lame explanation, and at last returned to bed and resumed my interrupted sleep.

Next morning, as I breakfasted on *croissants* and coffee in the *café*, I saw nothing to indicate that the *café* people or anyone else knew of my strange experience, and about the middle of the morning I went along to the Commissaire's office, which was quite near, to get my permit to enter the mining areas, as I had planned. The office was merely a room in the Commissaire's house, the doors of which were all wide open, as is usually the case in hot countries, and the Commissaire himself was a heavy-jowled, pleasant-mannered Belgian. On hearing my business he bade me be seated, and offered me cigarettes, while he filled in the necessary documents.

"R-o-g-e-r C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y." He spelled aloud the unfamiliar English name as he wrote it. "It is very warm weather, Monsieur Courtney, is it not?" he said, in French. "Nationality? English, of course. I myself have been to London."

He looked out across the veranda at the bush and the desolate few buildings that made up the little town,

blistering in the sun. "This is not a place for a civilized man to live in! True, one is a master here; but what is the use of such mastery? Peekadilly, le Strand—I know them. On my last holiday to Europe I visited London. It was a great experience. I remember . . ."

He chatted on, but my attention was caught suddenly by a person who, passing from one room to another, went through the office. It was the girl who had so strangely come into my room the previous night. Her eyes were big with alarm as she saw me.

"Who is that?" I asked, as the girl went into the next room.

"Oh, just my mistress," answered the Commissaire, and resumed the story of his experiences in London, which, at bottom, was little more than an account of the major differences between London, Paris, and Brussels. Perhaps he was trying to impress me with the acuteness of his observation and powers of comparison, a thing I have often noticed among prominent small-town people who have had some connexion with a metropolis.

I looked up, and saw that the girl was standing in the doorway of the room behind the Commissaire. She was staring at me intently, and as I looked up she put a finger to her lips, entreating me to silence. It was a tense figure she made as she stood there, and, almost without knowing it, I made a furtive gesture of assent. The next moment she was gone.

The Commissaire reached the end of his story, and rose. "There you are, Monsieur—the permit, all in order. There is no fee. I hope you will have good fortune in your carrying work. Call and see me next

AFRICA CALLING

time you come this way. I have enjoyed your talk. It is good to meet some one from the civilized places of the world. *A'voir, monsieur!* ” He did not seem to be aware that it was he himself who had done all the talking.

I went off along the road towards the *café*—and found the Commissaire’s mistress waiting for me near some bushes that hid her from the house. In a mixture of French and Kingwana she thanked me for not betraying her to the Commissaire. Then she went on something like this:

“He would beat me if he knew! Beat me! He is a harsh man. Especially with women. Only two days ago he ordered a native woman to be given the *chicote* [the rhino-hide whip]—flogged, you know.”

“Why—what for?” I asked.

The girl shrugged. “She gave a white man a disease. It is the law that when a native girl gives a white man a disease she shall be flogged. He ordered her ten strokes of the *chicote*. Her back is raw. Her screams—ah, they were terrible!”

“Do you mean that you have the disease?” I asked, not quite understanding what she was getting at.

She shook her head in vigorous denial. “No, no!” she cried hastily. “I spoke of that only to show how hard a man is my master. Truly he would beat me badly if he knew about last night. But it was not my fault that I was there!” she ran on. “It was the fault of the Greek who owns the *café*! He is a bad man, that Greek!”

In the native fashion she repeated and repeated how

bad he was; but I am trying to give only the purport of her speech, not her exact words.

"He is a witch-doctor!" She lowered her voice as she said it.

"A white witch-doctor!" I exclaimed. It was the first time I had heard of such a thing.

"And he put the 'call' on me," said the girl, meaning a magic influence whereby witch-doctors are said to be able to call to them anyone they please. In many parts of Africa this 'call' is well known—and feared. In Northern Liberia, for example, on the African West coast, it is used in connexion with the activities of the famed and dreaded Leopard Society there.

"For a long time he has wanted me," the girl continued. "He asked me often. Whenever my master was away he would come to the house. But I was too afraid. If my master found out he would beat me. He would be sure to find out. The beating would be terrible. I did not dare. The Greek—he tried me again and again, but always I said, 'No, I cannot.' When I said, 'Why do you not get some other girl? There are plenty of them,' he said he wanted me, and not some other girl."

She paused, waiting till some passers-by were out of earshot along the road.

"Last night," she resumed, "a great desire came to me to ask my master for permission to visit my mother, who lives near the *café*. My master gave me the permission, and I started off. But I never reached my mother's. As I went along my head suddenly became a blank, and I knew no more till I found myself in the Greek's bedroom at the *café*. He had put the 'call'

AFRICA CALLING

on me. He had worked his magic on me so that I would ask permission from my master to go out, and then would go, not to my mother, but to him. Only, the Greek was not in his room. Instead there was you—a stranger. I do not understand that.”

A singing, sobbing note entered her voice. “Ah—ah—ah—ah! To walk out like that and know no more! A bad thing! Ee—ee, a bad thing!” She turned abruptly, and went quickly through the bushes at the side of the road, back to her master’s house.

At the *café* I found that the peculiar proprietor of the place had returned. He was in the process of abusing his blowzy assistant for having let me have his bedroom. He was a little man, fair-skinned for a Greek, and very voluble and excitable. At sight of me, however, he stopped, held out his hand, and, with many expressions of pleased surprise, addressed me by name.

I then recognized him as a man whom I had met during a previous expedition to the Congo—the owner of a store in the region of the Ituri forest, where, as a White Hunter, I was taking a client to visit the pigmies. At the time I had been the means of doing this man a trifling service, the details of which I need not go into here, and it appeared that he had never forgotten it.

In his excited way he called for drinks, seemed to forget all about my usurping his bedroom, and, in French, Kingwana, and English of a sort, chatted volubly of things that had happened since we last met. It was easy for me to introduce the subject of witchcraft in a seemingly casual and natural way. But I need not have bothered to make it seem casual. The strange little Greek was all eagerness for the subject.

A MAGICIAN

“ I am very interested in witchcraft,” he said. “ Every one knows I am. They call me the White Witch Doctor.”

He lit a cigarette, flicked the lighted match across the table at which we sat, on to the floor, and shouted for some one to come and extinguish it—“ before it burns the place down! ” he cried. Then he turned to me, adding, in his halting English, “ These people who work for me here—they are without care. No—I have it not right. I mean, they are *care-less*. Yes, *careless*; they not care if the place it damn’ burn down.” Then he plunged straight into an explanation of how he had come to take up the study of witchcraft.

He told me that it began with his prophesying to a certain native chief that he, the chief, would die in a certain way before a certain date. The Greek was labour-recruiting at the time—that is, obtaining native labourers for planters and others, at so much per head—and doing well enough at it. But at one village, where there were many strong young men such as he wanted, they all refused to be recruited. A vain attempt by the Greek to bribe the chief to use his influence over the young men resulted in a violent quarrel, at the end of which the Greek prophesied that before the coming of the next full moon the chief would be killed by a one-tusked cow-elephant.

“ A queer thing to prophesy, wasn’t it? ” I put in at this point in the story.

The little Greek nodded. The words, he said, had seemed to jump from his mouth. “ But what was more queer,” he added, “ was that I knowed it would happen. I knowed. Yes.”

AFRICA CALLING

He went on to say that all the chief did at the time was to laugh at the prophecy. But the Greek heard that afterwards he was very careful in the bush when elephant were about. Evidently he did not know whether the Greek could prophesy truly or not, but wasn't taking any chances. But all his care was in vain. One evening, as he was returning from a hunt, he heard a slight noise, and looked round, to find a baby elephant nosing about near by. The chief stood perfectly still, as did the two or three others who were with him. The danger was not from the baby elephant, as such, but that the creature should see them and squeal with fright or curiosity, and bring the rest of the herd along to see what was the matter. Many a man has lost his life through a baby elephant in this manner. For a tense half-minute they stood there. In the words of one of the men who were with the chief, and who later told the Greek the story, they "were stiller than the trees." The baby elephant went on nosing about. The wind was the wrong way for him to scent the humans, and for this the men were glad. But it was the only thing in their favour. The adult elephant were not far away; from somewhere in the bushes came the low rumbling that goes on almost continually in the great stomachs of elephant.

Then suddenly the baby elephant saw the men. For a moment it looked at them; then gave a high little squeal. Immediately there was a great rustling of the bushes near by, and the form of an adult elephant appeared. It was a cow, and she had only one tusk, the other having been broken off in some accident. The men scattered and ran. The great elephant,

trumpeting shrilly, and, no doubt, thinking her calf in danger, came lumbering at the nearest of the men—the chief. Dodging and sidestepping, he sought desperately to avoid her, but it was no use. The elephant caught hold of him with her trunk and flung him down at her feet. Then she knelt on him, and by the sheer weight of her body pressed out his life.

Thus, said the little Greek, did his prophecy come true; and the result of it was that he recruited all the natives he wanted from that village. The people regarded him as a great witch-doctor, and were afraid to displease him.

But the little Greek was as much impressed by the affair as they were. Convinced that it was not a coincidence, he determined to investigate this strange power within him.

To this end he made friends with various native witch-doctors, which was easy enough, as they had heard of the one-tusked cow-elephant affair, and already regarded him as one of their kind. He learned all kinds of strange secrets from them, and attended many strange meetings, often at dead of night in the depths of the bush.

It was because he had gone to one of these meetings the previous night that his room was vacant and I was able to occupy it.

He began, he told me, with *uganga*, or white magic—that is, curative or preventive magic. He learned that all objects, animate and inanimate, are possessed of a spirit, sometimes good, sometimes evil. Therefore, when he gave a man a dose of medicine for some sickness, an ordinary herbal medicine, he whispered an

AFRICA CALLING

incantation to the spirit of the medicine, whereby it obtained strength to arise and overthrow the spirit of the disease. In the same way he learned that it was a very good thing for a native before going into battle, or to hunt big and dangerous game, such as elephant, to anoint his spear and shield with a concoction pleasing to the spirits of these weapons of offence and defence, and then appeal to those spirits to do their best for him in the coming danger, at the same time reminding them of their victories in the past.

Many such things did he learn before going on to *uchawi*, or black magic—a much more profound business, ranging from putting the *dawa*, or a bad spell, on people, to levitation and conjuring up and consorting with strange spirits.

He told me that, although so far he himself had not been able to perform this feat, he knew several native witch-doctors who could raise the dead. While keeping the exact location a secret, he described some of the ceremonies that he had attended at night in the depths of the bush—ceremonies whereby, through deliberate concentration of will and thought, evil influences were sent to various persons, driving them to suicide or madness. He spoke of these influences as living, tangible things.

For the witch-doctor who knew how to invoke and handle them they were invaluable servants. The witch-doctor needed only some intimate possession of the person to whom he wished to send the influences—a finger-nail or toenail paring or a hair.

This having been obtained, the rest was a matter of incantation and the application of certain principles

of thought and will; whereupon the influences went to and entered the mind of the person concerned, and possessed it. As at any time the body is merely the servant of the mind—that is to say, as there can be no action of the body that is not directed by the mind—the person concerned became the servant of the influences, obeying them in every particular so long as they remained with him.

This was the process, said the little Greek, whereby the ‘call,’ that strange phenomenon known, and feared, in so many parts of Africa, was sent to people. It was not easy, but, once acquired, ability to send forth the ‘call’ put a witch-doctor in a position of very great power. He could, for example, bring to him anyone he wished.

“Even girls?” I put in at this point.

The little Greek glanced at me quickly. But I maintained an air of general, rather than specific, naughty interest, and he answered airily, “Even girls!” and continued his account of the working of the ‘call’ and other phases of witchcraft. There was something childlike about the way he poured it all out; he was, indeed, very much like a child eagerly exhibiting a new and wonderful toy. But it was an unhealthy childlikeness.

At last it was time for me to go. Shaking my hand in farewell, the little Greek declared earnestly that he had very much enjoyed talking with me. I was, he said, a man of sense, whereas the people of the settlement were slow and uninteresting—Belgians who sat round drinking *siróp* all day, and Greeks who thought of nothing but trade and making money. They did not

AFRICA CALLING

take his witchcraft seriously; it was only the natives and half-castes and such who did that.

Then he said something which shed light on why it was during his absence that the mistress of the Commissaire had come to his room. "I make mistakes in my witchcraft," he said. "I do not know enough to be quite certain how and *when* it will work. But some day I will be perfect, and these other whites will acknowledge my powers!" Then, with quick little steps, he left me.

It seemed that while he had managed successfully to put the 'call' on the Commissaire's mistress, he had made a mistake about the particular night when she was to come to him.

He had made an error in timing, so to speak!

Whether he was able to correct this error in subsequent attempts I do not know.

CHAPTER VII

MORE MAGIC

SHORTLY after leaving the Congo town mentioned in the previous chapter I had another experience of witchcraft.

This time the person most directly concerned was myself. I had occasion personally to beat, for stealing, one of a number of local natives who hung about my camp. The man's offence was slight—merely the taking of a cigarette or two—and the beating I gave him was correspondingly slight. But it very much angered a certain person in the village. This was an aspiring witch-doctress (it must be understood that there are women practitioners of black magic as well as men), who was the lover of the man I had beaten.

That evening my boys came back from gossiping with the villagers, and I learned from my own personal boy that this young woman was going to put a *dawa* on me. In a slow and half-scared manner the boy declared that he did not know what the nature of the spell was going to be; but on pressing him I learned that it was an affliction called "the Face." The angry witch-doctress had wished "the Face" on me.

The action of this spell, or curse, it appeared, was that I should become aware of a floating, mask-like face a few inches before my eyes. This face would go wherever I went, would be always there before me. It would watch whatever I was doing. If I looked down

AFRICA CALLING

at the ground it would be there, looking up at me. If, seeking escape from the sight of it, I closed my eyes I should still see it. If I looked up at the sky there it would be, a little above my head, looking down at me. Should I strike at it, or seek to brush it aside, my hand would merely go through it, without disturbing it.

From all accounts, "the Face" was the spirit of persistence itself. The effect upon those on whom it was wished was that its constant presence so preyed on their nerves that they were driven to suicide. That was the fate the vengeful witch-doctress had in mind for me.

My boys were convinced that I should shortly be seeing this haunting face, and as the days went by they watched me closely for signs of distress. They waited for me to tell something of what they thought I was suffering. But I saw no haunting face, and my boys were at last compelled to accept this negative result.

Their faith in the powers of the witch-doctress remained, however; they merely inferred that her *dawas* did not work against white men. White men were a race apart, and not affected by many things that affected ordinary folk, such as natives. I replied mockingly to the effect that it was sad to think of the young witch-doctress working hard at making the *dawa* and achieving no result, but hinted that it was not so much that white men were immune as that I had considerable experience of witchcraft myself, and knew an antidote to her *dawa*.

My boys were very much impressed by this, and some time later I found their belief that I knew something of witchcraft very useful.

MORE MAGIC

For some time two of my boys had been very restless, and I was afraid that they might desert. Now, like the great majority of natives in that part of Africa, these boys had a firm belief in the power of anyone possessing anything personal of theirs—a strand of hair, say, or a bit of skin—to work evil on them. Wherefore one day I produced a pair of scissors, and before they knew what I was about had snipped a lock of hair from each of their woolly heads.

At first they thought I was joking, playing some kind of new game on them, and they laughed. But when they saw me put each lock of hair in an envelope, and write on it the name of the owner, the word *uchawi* rose to their lips, and they showed great alarm. They begged me to return the hair to them, and later, when I still refused, tried—unsuccessfully—to steal it.

From the time of my obtaining those locks of hair till their term of service with me expired the behaviour of those boys was ideal. Even then, so great was their fear of the power which possession of that hair was supposed to give me that on the final pay-day their first interest was in getting those envelopes containing their hair, rather than in their accumulated wages.

Belief in the superstitious was one of the greatest factors of their make-up—though, it must be said, perhaps they were no more superstitious than many civilized folk, with their fears of the number 13 or spilling the salt, and their beliefs in the efficacy of mascots or charms. Indeed, I remember on one of these journeys with my motor-truck meeting an African native who had been taken to London by his white

AFRICA CALLING

master to see the wonders of the white man's civilization, and was very much impressed by the way so many people were afraid of walking under ladders. It was spring, the time of great activity among house-painters and -repairers, and every street had its complement of ladders. So great were the number of the people who took pains to avoid walking beneath them that the African concluded that what he called "the Ladder Spirit" must be one of the chief agencies for evil in the country. He did not ridicule this practice of ladder-dodging, but acclaimed the wisdom which inspired the avoiding of such powerful evil.

Another witchcraft experience I had on this Congo trip was seeing a witch-doctor treat a woman for what I believe is known as "milk fever." The woman had been carried out into the clear space in front of her hut, and the witch-doctor was examining her as I arrived.

He was a shortish, elderly man, clad in a blanket, and with little to distinguish him from other natives. Witch-doctors put on all their paraphernalia and trappings only on special occasions. This man was doing an ordinary piece of work—on his ordinary rounds, so to speak. The only distinguishing features about him were various small bags suspended from his neck and a larger bag, of monkey-skin, at his waist.

He had, though, an air of importance and dignity, and the way he regarded the woman, lying moaning on a couple of blankets, was quite professional. He walked round her, studying the area of the trouble, which was in one breast only. He gave the impression

that this was a difficult case, but that he was quite competent to handle it. A member of the onlooking crowd of natives offered him a small leather bottle of snuff, and invited him to take a pinch. With an air of abstraction the witch-doctor shook out a good quantity on to the back of his hand and sniffed it up. For some moments further he studied the woman's breast. A mangy village dog sniffed inquisitively at the woman's leg, and the little doctor man gave it a kick with his bare foot that sent it yelping away.

Then at last he looked up and spoke. It was an order, to a couple of the youngsters pressing forward, to obtain a quantity of warm, fresh cow-dung. They picked up a clay pot, and ran over to where some cattle were grazing. The doctor produced from somewhere in the folds of his blanket a piece of ox-horn like a trumpet, and looked through it to see if it was clear. He waited impatiently for the youngsters. When at length they returned he looked at the contents of the pot and scowled. "That is no good!" he cried. It was fresh stuff that he wanted, he said; this was hard and old. The youngsters muttered to the effect that the cattle were very disobliging, emptied the pot, and set off to follow a fat old cow which they evidently thought promising. This time they were soon back.

The doctor ran his hands through the stuff in the pot, smelt it, and nodded. "That is right," he said, and, looking down into the pot, began to mutter in a low and even tone.

This was an invocation to the spirit of the 'medicine' to arise and overthrow the spirit of the sickness,

and for perhaps a full minute he kept at it. His expression was of great solemnity, and I know it was not assumed. Then, squatting beside the woman, he placed the ox-horn over her fevered nipple, and plastered her swollen breast with the steaming cow-dung. He put his mouth to the small end of the horn, sucked out as much of the air as he could, and deftly corked the hole. Already the cow-dung was beginning to cake, and he plastered a fresh lot over it.

The doctor sat back and waited. The woman moaned and writhed. The doctor curtly ordered a couple of women squatting near to hold her hands, and so prevent her interfering with the horn or poultice. The rest of the crowd stood round gaping and whispering.

Presently the doctor's remedial measures began to take effect. The horn was really quite a good suction-tube, and the poultice helped the suction considerably. The woman ceased moaning and lay still, relieved: the milk was beginning to flow.

When at length it was flowing freely the witch-doctor grunted and rose. An excited and relieved chattering broke out among the crowd. The witch-doctor looked about him, and said briskly in effect, "What about my fee?"

In response to an order from the sick woman's husband some children brought along a goat. The goat had a violent objection to being taken from the herd. It spread its forefeet, and hung back against the pull of the rope with which one child was dragging it along by the horns. Another child pushed the animal along from behind. The doctor looked at it critically, then

MORE MAGIC

nodded, and said that, though it was thin and none too young, he supposed it would have to do.

After which he redeemed his ox-horn, wiped his cow-dungy hands on his blanket, and accepted a pinch of snuff from a bystander, sniffing it up from the back of his hand. Then, with his reluctant and loudly bleating fee being dragged and pushed along behind him, the successful man of medicine walked off. Watching, I reflected that, unlike many doctors in civilization, he had at least been very promptly paid.

Some time later I used a version of this horn 'medicine' myself. To my camp one evening came a tall, thin, local villager suffering from a tremendous boil on his buttocks. The thing was about ready to draw, and the man was in great pain, and he begged me to do something for it. I made him lie face downward, with his afflicted part exposed; then I filled an aluminium water-bottle with boiling water, and, when the bottle was thus thoroughly heated, poured out the water and placed the mouth of the bottle over the boil.

At once, of course, the heat inside the bottle set up a terrific suction, and the bottle fastened itself firmly on to the man.

The remedy, however, was far more painful than I had expected, for no sooner had the bottle taken its grip, so to speak, than the man gave a tremendous yell and leaped into the air, tugging vainly at the bottle. The next moment he tore off into the bush, a tall, thin figure creating a great speed record, with my good old aluminium bottle clinging to his naked posterior like a bulldog.

In and out the trees he went, leaping and yelling,

AFRICA CALLING

starting up duiker and other small animals about his feet, and blundering into bushes that no doubt covered him with ants. Some distance along he came out on to the road, and went tearing along it out of sight. He never came back, nor did I ever see my water-bottle again.

One other outstanding experience of witchcraft did I have here in the Congo, and that was at an isolated Dutch mission station at which I called on my way to the mining districts.

The missionary was a much-travelled, English-speaking Hollander who had not seen another white for some time. He showed me round the place, and was most hospitable generally. As we strolled around I noticed that a portion of a murram wall which enclosed the station had been badly broken recently.

On my remarking upon this the missionary gave a little laugh, then nodded soberly.

"It was really very remarkable," he said, and went on to describe how the damage had been caused by a dying elephant crashing against it.

Some natives belonging to a village about a quarter of a mile away, he said, had trapped an elephant, of which there were numbers all about, by what is known as the log-and-spear method.

In this method a heavy log is firmly attached to a poisoned spear, and the whole suspended over the trail in such a way that an elephant coming along moves an ingenious trigger device, which in its turn releases the weighted spear and sends it plunging down into the elephant's back. (Incidentally, the poison is of a kind that does not affect the edible qualities of the flesh.)

MORE MAGIC

In such a huge bulk the action of the poison is naturally slow, and the hunters may have to follow an elephant so wounded for days before finally he drops.

So it was in this case; and, by some extraordinary chance, the spot where the wounded elephant, coming out of the bush at last, crashed to the ground and died was right against the wall enclosing the mission station.

The damage to the wall, however, did not matter so very much; the native hunters promptly offered to repair it. What troubled the missionary far more was the fact that it would take the natives at least some days to cut up and carry away the great mass of flesh; wherefore the mission for all that time would be subjected to a powerful and most unpleasant smell, to say nothing of the general mess there would be about the place.

The natives were much concerned about this, for they greatly liked and respected the missionary. They talked much among themselves about what was to be done, and at last one of the elders went to the missionary with the assurance that he could put his mind at rest on the matter.

The elephant, said the elder, would not be a nuisance to him after all. A way had been devised for removing it, and that promptly.

The missionary, naturally curious, questioned the elder how it was to be done, but the man gave only evasive answers, and the missionary was compelled to desist. (In certain circumstances, when a native makes up his mind to be secretive, nothing on earth will make him speak.)

AFRICA CALLING

This was at dusk, only an hour or two after the elephant had come staggering out of the bush, and the last thing the missionary saw that night before he went to bed, about ten o'clock, was the great bulk of the dead animal lying in the broken ruin of the wall.

The missionary remembered that night very well. It was hot and peculiarly oppressive, and he could not sleep. At one o'clock he rose and sat on the veranda. The bulk of the dead elephant was there plainly before him in the moonlight. There was no wind, and the night was very quiet. From the village, a quarter of a mile away, came no sound, not even the occasional barking of a dog or crying of a child—usual night sounds of a native village. It was an uncanny quiet. After a smoke the missionary returned to bed—but only to doze in fits and starts.

At two o'clock he again rose, and went out on to the veranda. The moon being so much higher in the sky, the elephant showed more clearly than ever. The missionary could see even the white gleaming of one of its tusks, as the moonlight shone on it. The night was still and quiet as before.

With a feeling of uneasiness that he could not define the missionary once more went back to bed. His dog, an intelligent fox-terrier which usually slept in a box on the veranda, came in and crouched by the side of the bed, whimpering strangely. The missionary picked up a book from a bedside table, turned up the lamp, and read for three-quarters of an hour. It was not till then—that is, at about a quarter to four—that, turning down the lamp, he finally went off to sleep.

Two and a half hours later, at sunrise, he was

awakened by his servant bringing him his usual cup of early morning tea—and the news that the elephant was gone! The servant could hardly get the words out for excitement.

Rising, the missionary ran down to the place where the great animal had lain. The broken wall and the flattened grass all about were the only indications of its having been there at all.

From some of the mission boys who were staring goggle-eyed at the place the missionary learned that word had come that the elephant was now in a spot close to the village.

As soon as he was dressed the missionary went to the village and found that this was true. The elephant was there, lying in the same attitude as it had lain against the wall. It was not cut up in any way; it was whole in every respect. Indeed, the natives were only just then coming to begin carving it up for eating. The great animal had very clearly been brought there *en bloc*.

The thing was—how? It most certainly had not been dragged or carried from the one resting-place to the other. Between the spot where it had lain against the wall of the mission station and the spot at the village where it now rested was only a narrow footpath through the bush, not nearly wide enough for such transporting of the great animal. Besides, even if it had been possible, there were not nearly enough able-bodied people in the village for the feat. Further, the grass between the two spots was unflattened and unruffled.

The Dutch missionary was a wise and broad-minded man who had been long in Africa and was well

acquainted with the manifestations of witchcraft. Because it might appear counter to his religious teachings, he did not say so straight out ; but he none the less made it clear that his private explanation of how that dead elephant of three or more tons weight had been transported in one piece over a distance of a quarter of a mile without leaving a trace was—levitation.

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT OF UNREST

SEEKING carrying employment for my motor-truck, I covered a lot of country in the Congo mining areas. The carrying was not a great success, however. I found that most of the transport business in that part of the Congo was in the hands of a Greek company; they had a monopoly, and it was hard for an outsider to break in.

But if I made no fortune, that is not to say that life was unexciting. Take, for example, a night I spent in a roadside godown in a remote part of the country. This, a small building, with a galvanized-iron roof, earth floor, and thatched walls, was simply a temporary store and clearing-house for various produce. No one lived in it, and the reason I camped there was that I arrived in the middle of a tremendous downpour of windless rain that had made an impossible mess of the usual camping ground, and looked as if it would go on for ever.

My boys were satisfied to camp in the truck, to huddle in the restricted shelter under its covered top, but I preferred the comparative spaciousness of the godown and the superior rain-resisting quality of its roof, and promptly moved in.

The place was dirty, littered with old thatch baskets that had been used for the carrying of produce, and in a corner was a great pile of bananas. One end of the

AFRICA CALLING

building had been boarded off to form another compartment, and in this was a number of bleating goats. Among the few items of cargo in my truck was a patent, and very expensive, hammock that I was taking to the wife of a highly placed mining official, and, having no liking for sleeping on that dirty ground, which was, no doubt, full of jigger fleas and other vermin, I had the hammock brought in and erected.

My boys and I then had our evening meal, after which I lit a hurricane lantern, fixed it in a convenient position for reading, took up an English magazine that I had discovered at one of the towns, placed cigarettes and matches ready to hand, climbed into the hammock, and settled down.

The rain made an incessant but even clatter on the iron roof—a thick, wide clatter, as might have been caused by multitudes of feet everlastingly tramping over gravel. Though so loud that it almost entirely drowned the bleating of the goats, it still was soothing in its steadiness. The lady's hammock was most comfortable, and I smoked and read on in a feeling of drowsy luxury.

Then I became aware of something touching my bare arm—crawling along it. In spite of the clamour of the rain, I heard a small crackling sound. The thing was on my left forearm, hidden by the way I held the magazine, and progressing steadily towards my rolled-up pyjama sleeve, above the elbow. It seemed to be scratching its way along. All this I took in within the fraction of a second.

With the utmost caution I moved aside the magazine—and saw that the thing on my arm was a red-

A NIGHT OF UNREST

and-black centipede, a good six inches long. It was a disturbing sight. All centipedes have a bite bad enough to lay a man up, but a red-and-black one of this great size can cause serious injury indeed.

My first impulse was violently to shake or brush it off. Then I realized that at the first sign of any such movement the creature would bite. I would have to be very stealthy, concealing my movements till the very moment of brushing the horrible creature away. First I slowly lowered my hand holding the magazine, letting the magazine slide from my fingers noiselessly on to the hammock. The centipede moved steadily on, his head moving from side to side, looking for a passage through the hairs of my arm. The scratching sound seemed drier than ever. He would soon reach the tucked-up pyjama sleeve—and be under it.

I cupped my right hand and swung it back for a stroke that would sweep the creature cleanly away. It was important that I should sweep him thus in the direction in which he was going; this was because a centipede's feet are hooked, and the hooks curve backward. Thus, to sweep him in the opposite direction would mean driving the hooks into my skin. I steadied myself for the stroke, and was careful to see that my elbow was not likely to strike anything—the hammock's support, for example—and be deflected. I could not afford to muff it. In a thing like this there was no taking a second shot.

But I did not muff it. The edge of my cupped hand caught the insect squarely in the rear, lifted it clean off my arm, and sent it flying. The operation had been, in reality, a simple one, but the moments taken to

AFRICA CALLING

accomplish it were tense enough for anything. I felt queerly cold for some minutes afterwards.

The next thing that happened was a rat-fight. Among the rafters were numbers of large rodents that constantly scurried about. Now and then, through the drumming of the rain, I caught the sound of their shrill squeaking. Now and then I would see their small eyes reflecting the light of the lantern.

The first indication I had of the fight was a glimpse of a rat scurrying swiftly along a rafter with another rat in pursuit. At a cross-beam immediately over my head the one overtook the other, and the fight was on.

First they crouched, facing one another, a foot or so apart, squeaking. The next moment they were at each other's throats. They reared up, worrying. They kept their footing on the narrow beam only with difficulty. Dust from the beam came showering down on me. The bodies of the struggling rats made vague shadows on the iron of the roof.

One rat half fell off the beam, his long tail swinging down, and only with difficulty scrambled back. Next the two animals were in a kind of clinch and rolling over and over. I saw that if they fell it would be right on top of me, and decided to get out of the way. It would be distinctly disconcerting, to say the least of it, to have a couple of large rats fighting on one's chest. I swung myself out of the hammock, and looked for something to throw at them.

I was out of the hammock only just in time. The next instant the two rats came tumbling down off the beam right into it. The hammock swung to the jolt,

A NIGHT OF UNREST

and one of the rats, frightened by the unusual situation, broke from his enemy and went scuttering along the sag of the hammock, trying to get out. But his enemy, evidently too incensed to be scared about anything, went after him and seized him, and the fight was on again.

Up and down the hammock they fought, clinging, worrying, scuttling. If it hadn't been that all this was going on in my bed it would have been most interesting to watch. But they were making a dreadful mess, and I began to think of the lady's hammock.

Groping, I found a stick, and brought it down as hard as I could on the pair of them. The blow killed one outright; the other tumbled out of the hammock and scurried away. With the end of the stick I lifted the dead rat out and flung it as far as possible from me. I saw it land near the heap of bananas.

I looked disconsolately at the hammock, which was covered with smears of blood and rat droppings and urine, and knew that there were a couple of hours' work with petrol and stuff for me in the morning before the thing would be at all fit to deliver to its lady owner. "Let this be a lesson, my boy, never to broach cargo," I said ruefully, as, after straightening things up a bit, I climbed back into the hammock.

But there was to be no sleep for me just yet. As I was about to turn down the wick of the lantern I caught sight of something moving among the heap of bananas—a long, thin, shadow-like thing that I knew to be a snake. It was making for the dead rat.

Feeling that of all the blasted places in which I had ever slept, or tried to sleep, this was absolutely the

AFRICA CALLING

bloodiest, I swung out of the hammock and grabbed a shot-gun which I had brought in and left against the wall. The snake had reached the rat, and was striking at it to discover whether it was quite dead. The reptile was a green mamba, a very venomous type of snake, about four feet long. I raised my gun and gave it both barrels, completely smashing its wicked-looking head.

The noise of the gun was deafening, and I thought it would awaken my boys in the truck, which was just outside, and bring them rushing in; but they heard nothing of it, and I realized that it was the confined space and the fact that the roof was of iron that made the sound seem so loud. For some minutes the snake, although headless, wriggled and thrashed about, making a pretty ghastly sight in the uncertain lantern light.

A snake is at no time a pleasing thing to look at, but a headless one thrashing about in a half-darkness, with the pulpy mass that had been its head swinging and flapping at unnatural angles—well, I was damn' glad when at last its movements ceased, and I was able to pick up the reptile on the end of a stick and open the door and fling it as far as I could into the darkness outside. I then returned to the hammock, and this time, without further ado, fell asleep.

Some two or three hours later I awoke with a start. The night seemed suddenly full of strange noise. The rain had stopped, and the noise was coming from the goats in their penned-off section of the building. They were bleating in an access of terror. I had never heard goats making such a fuss.

A NIGHT OF UNREST

But that was not all. From the roof outside was coming another sound. Something up there on the roof was scratching and sliding down its steep slope. The sound was like that of a nail on a slate. It began at the top, near the ridge, as from something moving rather rapidly down the slope, then slowly and laboriously working back up—only to make the descent again.

I thought, "Oh, hell, what a night!" and took my gun and the lantern and went outside. I hadn't the least idea of what was making that queer row on the roof; it was a sound which I had never heard before.

The mystery was soon explained. On the roof was a big leopard. He had dropped on to the roof from an overhanging branch of a tree, and had come after the goats—a fact of which the goats, scenting him, were fully aware; hence their distress.

But a galvanized-iron roof was something new to a leopard, and his claws could not dig in and grip it. The branch overhung the centre of the building, and the leopard had dropped down softly on to the ridge. That was all right; it was when he tried to go down the slope of the roof that he struck trouble. He slipped and slid. He stuck his great claws full out, curving, but they found nothing to grip.

Slipping and scraping, he went down the slope to near the edge of the roof, and only with difficulty managed to stop himself and scratch and crawl his way back up again. But before he could get a claw up and over on to the ridge he began to slip back again.

Thus it had gone on from the moment he left the ridge.

He was about half-way up the slope when I came out, and he turned his head, looked at me, and snarled. He was an ugly-looking devil; reflecting the lantern light, his eyes were flashes of vicious fire. I put down the lantern quickly, raised my gun, and pressed the triggers in quick succession.

The result was a pair of 'clicks,' betokening an empty weapon! I had forgotten about emptying both barrels into the snake. I had no more cartridges with me; the rest of my ammunition was in the truck. Scratching and slipping, the leopard made a tremendous effort to face me. He was snarling and spitting with great viciousness. In addition to being angry he was scared at the unusual experience of not being able to get a proper foothold. It struck me that a leopard that was both scared and angry was a remarkably dangerous proposition. Hardly knowing what he was doing, he might leap down on me from the roof. Already he was half-way to facing me. I picked up the lantern and flung it full at him. It was the only thing I had to fling that seemed in the least effective. Then I dashed inside and bolted the door.

It is astonishing what a long time all this takes to tell compared with the actual time it took to happen. From the moment I spotted the leopard till I was back inside the building only a few seconds elapsed. It was a matter of instantly raising the gun, dropping it when I found it was empty, then throwing the lantern and dashing for the door. Included in those few seconds were my deductions as to how the leopard had come to be in such a peculiar position, as well as my thoughts of fear.

A NIGHT OF UNREST

I felt my way to the hammock, got the matches, struck one and by its light climbed in. I was about fed up with the godown as a camping place, and decided that if there were any more disturbances I would go and squeeze in with my natives in the truck—which would be very much of a last resort, considering that, with the three of them in it, the truck was already full, and that the natives gave out a strong odour.

But it seemed that there was to be peace at last. The scratching of the leopard on the roof ceased suddenly, whereby I knew that he had got on to the ridge at last. Then came the brushing of the overhanging tree branch as the leopard sprang up on to it and made his escape, and it bent beneath his weight. The bleating of the goats died down, and all that was left of the rain was a quiet drip-drip-dripping. For half an hour or so I smoked in the darkness, then, determining to sleep in awhile in the morning and so make up somewhat for the disturbed night, I dozed comfortably off.

But I was not to get my sleep-in. Soon after dawn I was awakened by a tremendous yelling from one of my boys. Cursing, I sleepily got up and went out to see what the devil was the matter this time. The boy was jumping about and shouting to his companions, who were still rolled up in their blankets asleep in the truck.

"There is a snake in the truck, *bwana!*" he cried, when he saw me.

"Very nearly it bit me!" he went on. "It was on the rail of the truck, and as I got up my hand touched it! Ee—ee, but it nearly bit me! At the touch of my

hand it dropped down inside the truck, among the blankets of the other two boys! Ee—ee, a bad business! Wake up! Wake up!" He hammered on the side of the truck.

Presently the black face of one of the boys appeared over the rail.

"Ugh!" he grunted sleepily. "What is the matter?"

"A snake!" came the excited answer. "In among your blankets!"

The sleepy expression of the black face at the rail vanished. "Eh, eh, eh, eh, eh!" cried its owner, and leaped up as though on a spring, and bounded over the rail to us.

The first boy and I climbed up on a wheel of the truck and looked inside. The third boy was crawling slowly out of his blanket. From beneath the blanket dropped by the second boy showed the tail of the snake.

"There! There!" cried my companion, leaping over and bringing a stick down heavily on the reptile. The boy crawling out of the blanket stared a moment in surprise, saw the snake, woke right up, and leaped over the rail clean on to the ground. In a moment he and the second boy were back with sticks. All three belaboured the reptile beneath the blanket.

They were greatly excited. They put all their weight into the blows. The blanket became all cut and torn. "A snake! A snake!" cried one. "We might have been bitten as we slept!" cried another.

They stopped at last. The snake, it seemed, was now dead. It showed no sign of resistance or movement

A NIGHT OF UNREST

through the blanket. With their sticks they cautiously lifted back the blanket.

The snake was dead all right. It had been dead some hours. It was the reptile I had shot in the go-down and flung out into the darkness with a stick. It had landed on the rail of the truck, which was quite close, and hung there limply till the first boy to awaken touched it, and knocked it down inside the truck!

CHAPTER IX

JUNGLE WILES

WHILE I was living in these remoter parts of the Congo I had very often only the roughest of foods. Sometimes it was a matter of existing for days on end on flour and potatoes. Hence it was with great delight that one day, during one of these periods of poor feeding, we found a bees' nest filled with honey. Wild honey-bees are all over Africa, but finding their nests is not easy. One sometimes discovers them through the agency of a bird.

This bird belongs to a tribe known in many parts of the country as "honey-birds"—so named because of the way they will lead a man to where honey is to be found. My first encounter with this kind of bird was upon awakening from a midday doze to hear one chattering loudly in the branches of a tree over my head. He was keeping at it most persistently, and as I looked up he hopped from branch to branch, as though urging me to get up and follow him. His attitude was exactly as if he were saying, "Wake up, you fool! There's honey—honey—*honey!*"

He was a small creature, drab and undistinguished, but comically pert, and he looked down at me with his small head on one side.

Not yet fully awake, and wanting to doze further, I lazily threw a small stone at him. But he was not discouraged. He merely hopped away a bit, and

JUNGLE WILES

chattered all the louder. At length the full significance of the bird's presence sank in, and I got up. A quantity of beautiful rich honey was well worth abandoning a nap for.

I called my boys, pointed to the honey-bird, and told them that we were going to follow him. They gave a shout of delight, and one picked up a stick from the cooking-fire and whirled it round his head to get it glowing, for use in the smoking out of the bees when we found them, and the others got a couple of *pangas*—a kind of heavy brush-knife—and, with the bird leading the way, we started off.

The bird's manner of leading was to fly from tree to tree just ahead of us. If he got too far ahead he would wait till we came up. He chattered all the while, as though encouraging us, and looked round to see if we were following.

Once he stopped, turned over on a twig, and, hanging by his feet, looked back at us upside-down. It was as if he were wearying of the business of leading us slow humans, and was putting a spice of variety into the affair. Some moments later he fell foul of another small bird. The affair took place in the midst of some leaves; so we couldn't see it. But we heard it—a great lot of screeching and squawking. Then our little fellow came out, arranged his somewhat ruffled feathers, looked to see if we were still following, then went on leading us as before. He was a real sticker to his job, was our honey-bird.

At length we came to the bees' nest. The little bird indicated it by flying round the spot a couple of times, and then resting on a branch near by. The nest was

in a hole in an old decayed tree-stump. All round the bees were droning. As soon as he saw that we had spotted the nest the little bird ceased chattering. As though very pleased with the way things were going, he swung himself upside-down several times, then sat up straight and wiped his beak on his feathers, in expectation of the feast to come. For it must be understood that the bird had not led us to the honey from any altruistic motive. It was strictly a matter of business. It was a case of, "We're partners. I'll show you where the honey is, and you do the digging out of it. We share the spoils."

We got down to this work straight away. Some dry twigs were thrown in a heap against the stump and covered with green leaves. Then the fire-stick was thrust in. The green leaves gave forth a considerable smoke, and, under the protection of this, the boys rushed in and hacked at the stump with their *pangas*. The bees, bemused by the smoke, mostly left them alone, though now and then one would land on a boy and half-heartedly sting him. Within a few minutes the whole nest was exposed, and the boys were scooping out great handfuls of the comb and putting it into a couple of *sufurias*, or cooking-pots, which they had brought along. The mixture I looked upon was rather dirty-looking stuff, full of bits of stump, dead bees, and bee grubs, needing a lot of straining when we got back to camp, but containing the very finest honey. (Though bees are bees, whether wild or tame, there is something about wild honey that gives it a flavour superior to any other.)

Meanwhile the little bird was hopping about his

branch rather anxiously. However, when one of the boys placed a large piece of the comb, full of grubs and honey, on a neighbouring log for him he promptly flew down and, after a period of dancing round it, began to eat, picking out the grubs first. This was his share, his reward for bringing us to the nest that he had discovered. The boys gave grunts of approval. One, who was a bit of a wag, bowed to the bird and cried, "*Ahasanti, rafiki!*"¹

But another added slowly, "Ye-es! As a friend he is all right! But look out if such a bird becomes your enemy! As an enemy—Ee—ee—ee!" He put a finger to his nose and blew it sickeningly—a common native gesture to indicate that words failed him. Then he went on, heavily and slowly, to inform me, as if I didn't know already, that he who cheats a honey-bird of his share is in danger of being led to his death next time.

The honey-bird, he said, does not forget. He knew a man once who cheated a honey-bird in this way, and a truly terrible thing befell him. He was, he said, his father's brother, and he was a mean man—a very mean man! Plenty of cattle he had, and goats and sheep. All over the place they were, like the grass. Yet so mean was he that he would walk through his *chamba*, or cultivation patch, and count the mealie cobs. And woe betide his women if there was one missing! He would even measure out the *posho*, or maize meal, to his wives! Even then he would give them only a small dish of it. And his sons remained unmarried because he would not give them cattle

¹ "Thank you, friend!"

to buy wives. And every man whom he had dealings with went away poorer than when he came. The mean man cheated.

Always he cheated. He even cheated a honey-bird one day. After the bird had shown him where the bees' nest was—and a big, rich nest it was, too—the mean man put out none for the honey-bird, but took it all away to his hut, every bit of it.

But the honey-bird did not forget. He waited and waited, till his chance came.

One morning, as the mean man was counting his mealie cobs, the honey-bird appeared on a tree branch and set up his chattering, hopping from twig to twig in the direction of the bush.

"Ho! Ho!" thought the mean man. "He is come to lead me to some fine honey! I will follow and get it!"

With a man to help carry home the honey, he followed the bird. On and on it went through the bush, hopping from branch to branch, from tree to tree. At last it stopped, and flew round and round an old rotten stump of a tree, and then perched on a limb. The man went up to the stump, which had a hole in it.

There were no bees about, and he said to the man with him, "That is strange." And the man said, "Yes." Then the mean man said, "But the honey-bird would not bring me here for nothing. Perhaps the stump is full of honey, but the bees have gone away for some reason. I will see." He went to the stump and put his hand into the hole.

He brought it out quickly. There was a terrible

JUNGLE WILES

look on his face. The head of a puff-adder showed up out of the hole, hissing. It had bitten his hand.

"I am a dead man!" cried the mean man, looking at his hand. Instead of leading him to a bees' nest the honey-bird had led him to where this puff-adder lay.

The bird chattered loudly and hopped away. The bite of a puff-adder is death, and it was not long before the mean man was dead. While he was able to cheat people and not get paid out, a honey-bird got even with him.

A little later in this same region I had a curious experience with a lion. Very early one morning some natives from a near-by village came to my camp and asked if I would come out and shoot a couple of lions for them.

The natives were in a state of anger and general excitement. They explained that during the night the two lions had got into the place where the natives kept their cattle and taken off a couple of good-sized calves. The place was surrounded by a high tangle of thorns and bushes, called a *boma*, through which lions could not pass, and the natives had therefore thought the cattle safe. But these two lions had leaped over the top of the *boma*, which was distinctly a good leap, for the *boma* was seven feet high. But that was not all. Having grabbed the calves, they leaped back over the *boma* with them. How they managed this no one seemed to know. (I had heard before of lions leaping back thus over a *boma* with heavy prey—in one case it was a man. The leaping power of lions is wonderful.)

AFRICA CALLING

But the natives were in no mood to dwell on how it had been done. They had lost their calves, and they wanted the lions shot.

"Otherwise they will be always coming back, till all our cattle are gone," said their leader. "We have only spears, but you, *bwana*, have a rifle. It will be easy for you to kill them."

I said, "All right," and got my rifle and ammunition. It was just sunrise, and the lions had taken the calves only an hour or two before. This meant that if we hurried we had a good chance of catching them before they had finished eating their kills.

The thing was to find them. They might have taken their prey into the bush a couple of miles or more. To go to the *boma* and scout round for their tracks and follow them would mean a lot of valuable time. I learned from the natives that the ground in the neighbourhood of the *boma* was hard and bare, and that picking up and following tracks on it would be slow and difficult. I knew a better trick than that.

It was to search the sky for sign of vultures. Already some of those astonishingly keen-sighted birds would be spotting the lions at their kills, and coming to get what they could. Sure enough, from a clear space near by, I spotted far up in the sky a tiny speck, which presently descended in great wide circles, finally coming to earth at a point which I judged to be about a mile and a half from where I stood. Another vulture came down in the same spot, then another. From away to the right and left still others—which had seen the first ones descending—appeared, and came swooping swiftly. There was no doubt at all that it was the

lions' kills they were after, and, carefully noting the direction, and with a number of the villagers trailing after me, I set out for the spot.

It was a lovely morning, bright and almost windless. Here and there we saw game—reed-buck mostly—and were careful not to disturb them and so alarm the lions. The low sunlight gave a glowing, living tone to the colour of their skins. For about half an hour we went on thus. Then we had indications that our quarry were not far away. Here and there about the trees sat vultures—great grey, ugly creatures, with their monstrous beaks looking horribly effective. They were all facing in the same direction; from their position in the trees they could see the kills.

Noting that what little wind there was came from the wrong quarter for the lion to scent us, I went cautiously forward in the direction in which the vultures were looking. The natives crept behind me like ghosts. Most had spears, and carried them ready for instant use.

I held my rifle at the ready. The bush there was thick. In dealing with lions too much emphasis cannot be placed on readiness. The trees became thicker and thicker with vultures. They were there in scores. They looked like some ghastly gallery of spectators. In reality they were waiting for the lions to finish, so that they could share in the feast which just now they were compelled more or less patiently to watch.

For some yards I went on thus, then saw my quarry. They had no suspicion of my presence. The half-eaten bodies of the calves lay about twenty yards apart. A fine large lion was at one and a lioness at

the other. Just after I had glimpsed them, however, the lioness moved off into the bush and disappeared—went off to her cubs, perhaps, having herself had enough to eat for the time being. My sight of her had been the merest glimpse, and she was gone even before I had time to raise my rifle.

A flock of vultures immediately flapped down heavily from the trees on to the lioness's calf, and began tearing into it with their great hooked beaks. I turned my attention to the lion. I found that he had stopped eating, and was looking angrily at the vultures tearing at the lioness's calf.

He left his own kill, and bounded over to them, to chase them off. The vultures scattered awkwardly, and flapped up into the safety of the trees.

But a number of the other vultures had now descended on the lion's own kill, and were tearing into it for all they were worth. The lion bounded back and scared them away, as he had scared away the first lot.

At once the first lot descended again, and tore into the lioness's kill.

The thing developed into a first-class comedy of the bush. At whichever kill the lion was not, there the vultures were.

The lion was kept busy running from the one kill to the other to scare the birds away.

It was hard not to laugh out loud. In the few moments which the vultures had each time at the kills they managed to tear out at least some bits of meat and get away with them; but the lion had no time to eat at all. He was too busy running from the one

JUNGLE WILES

kill to the other. As the thing went on he became a very angry and worried-looking lion.

Then, in a most intelligent way, he suddenly ended the whole affair.

He simply dragged the one kill right up close to the other!

With the outwitted vultures staring down from the trees, he then began eating comfortably. Almost there was about him an air of wondering why he had not thought of this before.

I was rather sorry to have to shoot him. If he had not been a cattle-stealing pest I should, as a reward for his intelligence in outwitting the vultures, certainly have let him go.

CHAPTER X

THE POACHER

THE time came at length when I saw very clearly that there would never be much for me in the Congo transport work; whereupon I crossed back over the border into Uganda, and employed my motor-truck in carrying raw cotton from native cultivation areas to various ginneries.

It was work that showed me an aspect of native life of which hitherto I had seen little. Many of these native cotton-growers—small-holders—were quite well off. They had motor-cars. They and their families wore expensive European clothing. They employed other natives to work for them. They tried to behave like white men. No doubt they tried to *think* they were white men. Very often the results were curious. Here is a little scene that leaps to my memory.

I had pulled up to fill my radiator at a roadside spring. Right beside the spring was the thatched house of one of the native cotton-growers. About the open doorway outside were the wife and family.

The open doorway gave straight into the room behind them; there was no passage. In the centre of the room was a large bedstead, ornate with brass rails and knobs. I had never seen a bedstead that carried so much brass; in every spot where it was possible to place a knob or bit of rail or scroll, there, sure enough, it was.

THE POACHER

On the walls hung various pictures cut from magazines, and some framed advertising almanacs, no doubt for different years, and an array of silk or satin dresses and other finery. More such finery lay untidily on the bed. On rickety-looking bamboo tables stood some ornate vases, variously chipped. A scraggy hen picked about industriously on the floor.

A gramophone was playing on the ground outside the door. The record was of a very vulgar Swahili song. The family group comprised the planter's wife, her son and daughter. Evidently father was away. The wife was a very fat woman, in a dress with a flower pattern like a wallpaper, and she was squatted on a little stool, with her fleshy and smoke-black knees exposed. She had a ring through one nostril, other rings in her ears, and her head was so shaved that it was all an affair of little channels and tufts of hair.

The son was a loutish youth of perhaps fourteen, dressed in khaki shorts and a very white topi, with very white sand-shoes on his sockless feet. The daughter was a year or so older, and wore a slightly soiled imitation-silk dress of salmon-pink, rather loosely blouse-like in the upper part and too short below.

Against the wall squatted Granpa, a skinny, grubby old man in some one's cast-off shirt, worn outside a likewise cast-off pair of shorts. With a bony finger, which he kept sucking, he was busily scooping out fragments from a recently emptied sardine-tin.

Suspended from the eaves of the roof near the doorway were some bunches of ripe bananas. One of the bananas, over-ripe and rotten, dropped squashingly on

AFRICA CALLING

to the gramophone. "Ho! Look at that!" cried the fat woman. "I cannot hear the song!" cried the daughter.

The son took off the record, flung away the banana, and, without attempting to wipe up the squashy mess, turned the record over and started the other side playing, which was another very vulgar Swahili song. Grandpa went on steadfastly scraping out the sardine-tin and sucking his oily fingers. He evidently had little interest in music.

I had filled my radiator, and was about to get back into the driving-seat, when a car came up. It was father, returned from a trip to town. The car was fairly new, but terribly dilapidated. It might have been on the roads for years and years. The mud-guards were bent, the body was all scratched and dented. There was an obvious lack of lubricating oil; squeaks came from every part, and the engine radiated an almost overpowering heat. It was driven, not by the cotton-growing small-holder, but by a native chauffeur. He drove far too fast. He brought the car bumping and crashing over the ill-made road. The cotton-grower, in the back seat, was alternately lifted high and dumped. The car stopped with a horrible jerk and jamming of brakes, and the cotton-grower, carefully flicking specks of dust off his clothing, got out.

He was a jet-black person in tremendously creased trousers, hitched high enough to reveal coloured silken socks. A yellow waistcoat next caught the eye; then yellow shoes, a high collar and shining tie, and a very correctly dented new felt hat. A cane was hooked on

THE POACHER

to his arm. He looked like some comic creature off a variety stage; it would have been quite in order had he broken into a song and dance.

The chauffeur started the car with great suddenness, and took it round to the back of the house, where, it being now near evening, various hens fluttered on to it to settle down for the night. The cotton-grower looked at me, produced a cigarette, fitted it into a long holder and lit it. He was losing no opportunity of making himself appear a person of importance. If only he had known how utterly impossible it was in that comic rig!

With his hands in his pockets he strolled over to me. "Good day, white man!" he said.

This was no way to address a white man. Such familiarity was definitely insulting. I looked him sternly in the eye. I am, I hope, not one of those stupidly overbearing whites who are always putting the natives 'in their place.' But this fellow's airs were not to be tolerated.

"Where I come from black men call me 'master,'" I said. "Now, take your hands out of your pockets when you speak to me!" (For a native to keep his hands in his pockets while addressing a white man is an acute expression of disrespect.) "Are you man or monkey?" I asked, as he hesitated. To a native there is hardly anything worse than being called a monkey.

There was a moment's pause. The man tried to return my gaze, but failed; his hands came slowly out of his pockets; his 'civilization' dropped from him; he took the cigarette out of his mouth. He

looked extraordinarily sheepish. "*Nini, bwana?*"¹ he stuttered.

Then, with the cigarette wagging uncertainly between his fingers, he shuffled to his doorway. His daughter, who, with the rest of the family, had watched this scene open-mouthed, giggled. The last thing I saw as I got into my truck and drove off was her father giving her a clip over the ear for it.

In this Uganda-Congo-border region I one day came across the camp of a remarkable man. He was a poacher—not of rabbits, pheasants, and such, as the word might suggest in England, but of elephants. He was an ivory-poacher. An ivory-poacher is one who goes elephant-hunting, for ivory, without paying the licence fees demanded by the authorities. These fees range from £28, for a pair of elephants, in the Congo to £150 in Kenya. In addition to saving these sums of money the poacher has the advantage of not being restricted in the number of elephants he shoots, as is the case of a man with a licence.

This man had poached all over the country—from Portuguese East Africa to Eastern Kenya and the Belgian Congo.

When I came up he was standing beside his camp, which was merely a tent fly fastened from the side of his motor-truck to the ground. The spot was less than a couple of miles from the Congo border. On seeing me he gave a shout which a stranger would certainly have taken to be most offensive: "Hullo, yer bloody freight-hound! Ain't they deported yer yet?"

¹ "What, master?"

THE POACHER

But I had met him several times before, in various parts of the country, and knew this for a habit he had of being facetious.

"Freightin' cotton an' stuff don't seem much of a game ter me," he said, when, sitting on a box in his camp, we were having a yarn together. "Sissy, I call it!"

He was an enormous creature, six feet five and proportionately broad, but queerly bent, so that he looked like a great bear. He had been mauled and knocked about by various big game—twice by leopards. One of these leopard maulings had left him partly paralysed down one side, and he had to use a stick to get along. His gait had a limp in it, but with his length of stride, and a swing he brought into it, he was capable of moving at great speed.

He was one of the best big-game hunters I have ever known, a real old-timer—and very cocksure and boastful.

"Carryin' cotton!" he snorted. "Workin' for a bunch o' damn' niggers! Why don't yer go in for a man's game—like what I'm at? Look at the money there's in it!"

"Are you asking me to join in with you?" I asked.

He snorted again. "Askin' yer nothin'! I'm only tellin' yer about it. See here, me boy: d'yer know how much I made ivory-poachin' down in Portuguese East, where I was only a few weeks back? Four hundred bloody quid! Not bad for three weeks, eh?"

He gave a boasting laugh that was habitual with him. "Easy as winkin', gettin' elephant in the Portuguese territory. Some o' them Portugee officials—yer

AFRICA CALLING

can do anythin' yer like with 'em. A coupler bottles o' whisky, and they're ready to look the other way if yer caught gettin' ivory and no licence. I even sold some o' the ivory right there in the Portugee territory. No smugglin' it over into Tanganyika or nothin'. I fixed it up with one of the officials. 'One tusk for me and one for you,' I says, and 'O.K.' he says in Portugee. Rum lot, some o' them Portugee officials! Scared stiff o' the niggers. Stick around in their *bomas* as much as they can, with sentries always on duty. Cowardly and savage at the same time.

"I seen some comic things there. At one place I seen a lot o' prison niggers they'd set to makin' a road. They were all chained together, ten of 'em, with a big iron ball at the end o' the chain. Nine o' the niggers did the actual work on the road, while the tenth feller's job was ter shift the ball along as the gang moved on. I never seen anythin' so funny in all me life as that nigger shiftin' that there ball. What a way of puttin' in yer time, eh?

"But me real job was gettin' rid o' the ivory I brought over inter Tanganyika. It's one thing to get ivory without a licence in a foreign territory, but another to sell it in yer own territory. Every bit of ivory that's sold in the open market has a record number on it. It's sold by Government auction, and unless the owner's got a licence to shoot, he sort o' finds it hard to explain where he got it, and the blinkin' Government'll probably confiscate it on him. I planned to get it through to some Indians I knew. They would start carvin' it up straight away, make it into cigarette-boxes and such truck, where it couldn't

THE POACHER

be traced. The thing was to dodge the blasted game department and other officials. Some o' the tusks I lashed underneath the truck, to the cross-members o' the chassis. Another tusk I sawed up inter short pieces, and fitted them inside the cover o' the spare wheel. A good trick that, but if anybody'd tried to take the wheel off its bracket its weight would have given it away.

"With me ivory all planted like this I came to the border between the Portugee territory and Tanganyika, and went to cross over. The Portugee officials were squared like I said, but the British fellers was different. Yer couldn't square them. They had a look at me truck as I went through. Damme, one of 'em got right inside and nosed around. I was dead scared he'd go to lift the spare wheel off its bracket. But he was a fat cove, and the day was stinkin' hot, and he didn't take the trouble—not even to look under the truck. So, I got me ivory safe away to the Indians, and that was that. Still, even if that fat cove on the border had discovered the tusks, I'd a' found some way of bluffing him."

Again he gave his boastful laugh; then he said, "Got any liquor in that truck o' yours?" I said I had a half-bottle of whisky. "Why the hell didn't yer say so before?" he roared, and I sent a boy over for it. Tin mugs were produced, and my poacher friend poured himself out a nip. It was an extremely small one.

"No, me boy!" he said, when I expressed surprise at this. "I like me nip, but I can't afford ter whale into it when I'm on the job, like I am now. It spoils

me shootin' eye. I can't afford ter let anythin' do that."

He looked longingly at the bottle, but made no move towards having more of its contents; I greatly admired his will-power.

"I'm hoppin' over in the Congo termorrer to do a bit o' poachin'," he went on. "I been there bfore, and it's not hard to make a go of it if yer keep yer eye skinned. Here in Uganda, or in Kenya, a poacher ain't got much of a chance. The authorities is always on the watch. Over in East Kenya one day they chased me right into Italian Somaliland. They damn' near caught me. I'd a fine lot of ivory. I was only one jump ahead of 'em, as yer might say, all the way. I left notes at the various water-holes and campin' places for them to pick up as they came to them. Just for a joke, yer know. 'Stick to it!' I put in one of 'em. 'Faint heart never caught the fair poacher,' 'Couple of quid I win!' I put in another. I heard after it made 'em damn' wild. It beats me how some fellers can't take a joke!

"When I sold me ivory to the Somali Indians and came back into Kenya, they put a game spy among me boys. I thought he was just an ordinary nigger like the rest of 'em working for me, till one day he got a bit drunk and started boastin' ter one o' the other niggers of what he was. He'd been sent to report my poachin' movements, so's his bosses could wait and catch me out. I laid that there nigger down and gave him what-ho with the *kiboko*; damn' near flayed the backside off him. Then I sent him back to the game department with a note to say that if any more

THE POACHER

game spies came along they'd get it a bloody sight worse. No, me boy! They're too hot in Uganda and Kenya, so I'm going over into the Congo again. A man's got a chance there."

He picked up his heavy big-game rifle—a '475 Express, the smacking power of whose bullet was well over two tons—and began cleaning it. "I'm slippin' over the border on foot," he said; "just me and the boys. The idea is to get a couple of elephant quick, and nip back over here before the Belgians know anything about it. Sort o' tip and run, if yer can understand me. Very little expense, and all done quick as you like. So there y'are. Yer know all about it now. If yer get fed up with that sissy job of carrying cotton and wantin' go in for gettin' ivory on the cheap, you take my tip and do it this way."

Leaving him soon afterwards, I encountered among his boys a native who at one period had been in my own employment. In reply to my question as to how he liked working for this ivory-hunting white man he placed his hand on his cheek and shook his head.

"Eh—eh, *bwana*, but he is not like other men!" he said. "As a master he treats us well enough. But he knows not fear. Some day he will be killed."

He went on to relate how he had seen him perform what I think is just about the most foolhardy act I know. It was that of chalking his initials on the hind-quarters of an elephant in the bush.

He had done it for no other reason than to show off his prowess to a friend who was with him when the elephant was sighted. Crippled and all as he was, he crept forward through the bush with extraordinary

stealth. His boys and the friend held their breaths. The old hunter had seen to it, of course, that he was in such a position with regard to the wind that the elephant could not scent him. But with every yard the danger grew more apparent.

"*Bwana*, I was never so afraid in my life!" said the boy who was telling me the story. "The smallest mistake and the elephant would hear or see him."

Presently the old hunter was within two yards of the elephant's hind legs. They showed blue-grey and thick through the trees, like the trunks of trees themselves. Chalk in hand, he took another silent step forward. Then his hand went out, and he lightly chalked the letters on the nearest of the great legs.

Just as he finished, however, the elephant felt him and looked round. No doubt he thought it was a swaying branch that had touched him. He started to turn his body round. It was no use the man trying to escape by dashing back; the great trunk would have caught him at once, as it was to this side that the animal was turning.

The only way of escape was under the animal's great stomach, to the other side.

Ducking swiftly, he did it; and before the elephant could swing round to see what it was all about he had escaped safely through the bushes on the other side.

"Eh—eh, *bwana*, but some day he will be killed!" the boy repeated, as I went away.

And killed he was. It was on this very trip to the Congo that he was about to make when I met him, and it was an elephant that killed him. It appeared

THE POACHER

that for once his shooting eye failed him. He fired too high. Instead of the bullet taking the elephant in what is known as the 'third wrinkle' of the forehead—a vulnerable spot for which hunters usually aim—it struck the frontal bone and ricocheted off. With his usual daring the old hunter had made it a close-quarters shot, and he had no chance of getting away. The elephant reached for him with his trunk and took him and tore him to pieces. The legs and arms he flung here and there among the trees. The trunk portion he played with for some time before finally flinging it away and going off. The old hunter's boys had to gather up their master in a sack.

CHAPTER XI

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

BESIDES the old poacher, I came across other ivory-hunters in this region—properly licensed ones. The most striking of them was a certain wizened, inoffensive-looking little man with a slight affection of his left eye, whereby he was at all times liable to an involuntary wink, which gave to his most commonplace remark an incredible air of impropriety. He rather fancied himself as a ladies' man, and his visits to civilization, as represented by small towns, were very much bound up with seeking the society of the fair sex. In fact, news of the arrival from, say, England of an attractive young woman at some near-by town was enough to bring him in promptly from the bush. His amorous ends, however, were invariably defeated by the activities of his left eye, which, though quite involuntary, were so highly suggestive of the improper.

He was, none the less, one of the deadliest ivory-hunters in all the territories. He was intensely admired by his gun-bearers, who, as is the way with gun-bearers, considered themselves superior to other natives, and liked to swank about the hunting prowess of their white master.

"*Bwana kando-kando*"—meaning, broadly, "The Man who has hunted Everywhere"—was what they called this wizened little man, which was a tribute indeed.

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

Of his many adventures with elephant one has become almost legendary. One day in a thicket in a *spruit*, or dry river-bed, he shot a large bull-elephant—only to realize as it crashed to the ground that the rest of the herd were all round and he was trapped. The giant animals closed in, looking for him. It was only by an extraordinary device that the hunter escaped.

Running to the huge bulk of the dead elephant, which was partly on its side, he crept under between its shoulder and jowl to its ear, and pulled the great, wide ear over him to form a screen!

And there, crouched and motionless, he waited, while the herd tramped round looking for him. Once he heard the sniffing of a trunk a few inches above him, as one of the elephants investigated the body. Some of the sniffed air from the trunk blew on to him. He told me that as he crouched there, with that sniffing going on, he had a sensation of being tickled, and only with difficulty checked the natural reaction to giggle loudly. It was only because the strong scent of the dead elephant overpowered his own scent as a human being that those sniffing, searching nostrils did not find him. From the time he took cover under the ear till the herd of elephant gave up the search and went off, and the man was free to come forth, only a very few minutes elapsed. The little hunter told me that they were the most crowded few minutes of his life.

One other adventure will I tell of him. It was his last, and I heard of it some months later, after I had left this district. For once this intrepid hunter made a slip—and in elephant-hunting one slip is one

AFRICA CALLING

too many. His first shot with a double-barrelled rifle at a large bull-elephant—head-on, at the ‘third wrinkle’—did not quite get home. He fired again, and that shot did not quite get home either. The elephant was mortally wounded, but had plenty of strength left to carry him charging forward on to the man. With a sweep of his tremendous head he caught the hunter and stuck him clean through with one of his tusks. The bullets in the animal’s head then took effect, and he staggered and dropped—dead. The hunter’s gun-bearers and other boys freed the body of their master from the tusk.

The tusk had gone right through and come out at the other side for a couple of feet or more. The boys had to slide the body off the tusk.

It is always the way with elephant-hunting; only rarely does a hunter seem to last very long at it. I have hunted elephant a good deal myself at various times, and know what a risky business it is. Hunters will tell you that the buffalo is the most dangerous animal in Africa, and perhaps in a sense he is, being exceptionally quick and cunning; but the elephant is responsible for by far the greatest number of deaths among the hunting fraternity, and is held in much greater awe by white and black men alike. In fact, popular belief gives a regular ivory-hunter no more than five or six years before he is killed, or at least badly maimed.

The elephant is the real Lord of the Jungle. When he likes he carries all before him, trampling wide high-ways through the bush, snapping off trees like matchsticks, a living Juggernaut. In many districts he seems

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

to be greatly on the increase, and this, coupled with highly mischievous habits which he often develops, has made him a serious problem.

These mischievous habits include tramping in herds of fifty or sixty through, say, a coffee plantation, making roads many yards wide, pulling up and throwing away coffee-trees that have taken seven years or more to grow. In the same way they will go through mealie patches, eating the cobs and fanning themselves with the stalks. A mealie patch is a real holiday to them. They will stamp all through vegetable gardens, and root most destructively for sweet potatoes.

It is not much use, as a rule, a man's going out with his gun and shooting at herds like that. As a matter of fact, he might easily find himself the pursued one. And it is not easy to get away from elephant. As an old hunter friend of mine used to say, "You can run and climb a tree, mayhap; but the elephant is quite capable of pulling up the tree and hitting you with it."

So much damage do these raiding herds cause that frequently the game departments, entreated by the suffering farmers, have been compelled to call for hunters to come and drive the destructive animals clear away from the district.

On one occasion I myself was one of the hunters engaged on this task; and a most exciting business it was. The herd was a big one; it contained more than two hundred elephant; and we hunters numbered eight or nine.

We did not act together, but separately, each with his own outfit and boys. The arrangement with the

AFRICA CALLING

authorities was that we would be paid £10 for every elephant we shot, and hand in the ivory to the Government. The only restrictions were that we were not to shoot animals under a certain age, and that the total number shot per man should not exceed five. This meant that about forty members of the herd of two hundred would be shot, which was considered enough to scare the rest far out of the district.

Arrived in the area where the raiding elephant were, we hunters set out after them by different roads. I soon picked up tracks where they had been only a little while before, and presently there came from a mile or so away the sound of some of the other hunters' guns. I considered whether to go in the direction of the shots, or to wait where I was, in the hope that the herd would come towards me. I didn't want to be left out of the fun, and, in order to make sure, decided to go in the direction of the shots.

I had not proceeded very far when there was a sound of heavy bodies moving swiftly and a scattered crashing. The elephant were not in one large body, but in parties, and suddenly some of them burst into view a little to one side of me.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and in the lowering light they made oddly uncertain targets. One might think that a large elephant would be easy to see, whereas the truth is that he is extraordinarily difficult to spot, especially in such dappled sunlight.

I got three good views, however, and three good shots. The range was only fifteen or twenty yards, and each was a 'shoulder' shot. One animal slid forward, gasping, on to his knees, and, with his big stern high

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

in the air, died. The other two disappeared down the hillside on which they had been coming, and I heard them crash down among the undergrowth. With my boys behind me, I followed cautiously, and found them at the bottom of a small gully, the opposite slope of which they had not had strength to climb. They were not quite dead, and I had to finish them off. Meanwhile the rest of the herd had gone thundering on, where others of the hunters were waiting for them; the booming of the heavy elephant-guns came to me clearly. The herd was running a sort of gauntlet, and losing members all the way.

Our attack was most effective: the herd cleared right out of the district, back to their desert haunts a hundred miles away or more. I did not try to get more than the three animals; I was quite satisfied with earning £30 in such a short while.

There have been instances of what could quite justifiably be called 'banditry' among elephant. One such was in the Aberdare Mountains, where numbers of elephant would lie in wait for natives going to and from the market with their goods. These goods were carried on their heads, and the elephant simply put forth their trunks and took the things as the people passed along. Besides the loss of the produce, these episodes were terrifying in themselves.

Deviations and side-roads were made, but the elephant bandits found them in due time, and the robbings began again. It was only when hunters massed against them that at last the elephant were driven away.

Nor is it only when they are in herds that elephant

AFRICA CALLING

can be exceedingly troublesome. Often enough a lone animal will go 'rogue.' One reason for going 'rogue' is tuskache—a super-toothache. I remember one such animal creating a reign of terror over a whole district, smashing senselessly through *shambas*, destroying right and left. Woe betide any person or thing that stood in his path. At any time of the day or night there would come to the terrified natives a sudden squealing and high trumpeting, and the maddened monster would come thundering upon them out of the bush. The hunters employed to hunt down this dangerous beast frequently came across holes where the animal had thrust his aching tusk into the ground. Elephant often dig in the ground with their tusks, searching for roots, but the frequency with which this one did so, also the fact that it was damp, cool soil which he favoured, left no doubt that he was seeking to relieve the agony in his tusk. When eventually he was run to earth it was found that, because of some injury sustained long before, one of his tusks was badly decayed high up. Looking at that great area of bone decayed right back to the nerve, and thinking of the tremendous pain it must have caused, one felt truly sorry for the poor brute.

I have referred to this elephant as being "run to earth." That was actually what happened to him. Outwitting the hunters, he was at last caught in a native trap. This was a pit dug in a trail the animal was known to frequent. It was about eleven feet deep, quite wide at the top, but with the sides sloping down to a narrow bottom, in the centre of which a sharp stake was planted, point upward. The pit was then

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

covered with a light layer of leaves and twigs, cunningly arranged to look as though there was nothing but solid earth underneath.

Quite unsuspecting, the rogue elephant in due time came thundering along the trail, stepped on to the layer of leaves and twigs, and crashed down into the pit. The sloping sides of the pit jammed his flanks and gripped him tightly. He had come down heavily on the stake, and it pierced his stomach. The struggling beast was unable to get a hold with his forefeet, and the more he struggled the more did the pit, by its very shape, tend to grip him the tighter. The end was sure, but, as it would most certainly be slow, a hunter hastened it with a bullet.

Lord of the Jungle, it is seldom indeed that he is attacked by other animals, or himself has occasion to attack. Everything in the bush gets out of the way of elephant if it can. In fact, I have heard of only one contest between an elephant and another animal. The other animal was a rhino, and the account of it was given me by an old *kil'ngozi*. This word is applied only to native hunters of great skill in bushcraft and full of wisdom regarding animals.

He was a little dried-up man, dressed in a bit of goatskin and carrying a bow and arrows. On his feet were zebra-hide sandals, and at his belt was a knife in a sheath made from the skin of the hind leg of an impala antelope. Swung on a thong from his waist was a fly-whisk made from a zebra tail.

It was beyond Chacha Sinda (in the south-west region of Lake Victoria), he said, and it was caused through a baby elephant. The *kil'ngozi* had seen the

AFRICA CALLING

battle with his own eyes. The rhino was asleep under a bush, and the baby elephant, having wandered a little way from its mother, found him. Baby elephants are very curious creatures, and this one went right up to the sleeping rhino, sniffing and blowing. He couldn't quite make out what the great motionless beast was.

Then he blew into the rhino's ear, and the rhino awoke and surged up, making a great cracking of undergrowth. He puffed loudly, and looked about him wildly and savagely. The baby elephant gave a squeal of alarm and scampered heavily off.

At once there was an answering trumpeting, and a large bull-elephant and a cow-elephant came breaking out of the bush. The rhino whirled out into the open, with his head and tail up, thoroughly angry and looking for trouble. The wind was the wrong way for him to scent the elephant; in any case he was too irritated to care. Rhinos are very short-sighted, and when, wheeling, he saw only a dark mass he lowered his head and charged full tilt.

The bull-elephant was the nearer, and the rhino caught him in the stomach with a heavy upward plunge of his first horn. This horn was two and a half feet long and mercilessly sharp. With the whole of the rhino's two tons weight behind it the horn swept up into the unfortunate elephant for nearly its full length. It was only the second horn that prevented it from going in the final inch or two; as it was, the second horn itself had also pierced the elephant's stomach.

In his great pain the elephant swung away and

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

round. It was a movement which freed him of the rhino's horns. At the same time, making a sort of pivot of his hind legs, he brought the front part of his body sweeping towards the rhino, and, with his three or more tons behind the blow, drove his right tusk into the base of the rhino's neck, smashing clean through wind-pipe and jugular vein. The blow almost knocked the rhino off his feet.

The elephant shuffled back a couple of paces. The rhino lumbered off a few yards and stopped, with all four legs planted stiffly and his head craning forward. Blood streamed from his nostrils and mouth. For a moment or two he stood like that; then his head began stiffly to drop, and his knees to crumple, and he slipped forward on to his knees, with his chin resting on the ground. His labouring lungs sent gouts of froth blowing from the wound in his neck. After another minute or so in that crouched position he died.

Meanwhile the elephant had moved into the cool of the shadows. His movements were slow and awkward. From his stomach wound protruded a quantity of half-digested food—grass and bark—all of it bright green in colour. He half leaned against a big tree.

He picked up some dust and leaves in his trunk and blew it over himself. He was gasping. His ears were drooping—his great flapping ears.

He gave a little stagger, and the cow-elephant, which all this time had stood near by, came up and pressed her shoulder against his, to support him. He slipped a little. Under his weight the tree creaked and groaned.

The cow pressed in harder to support him, but had to shift back a bit, as his feet were sliding on to hers. The dying animal slipped farther, and went down on his side. He picked up a small leafy branch and weakly patted himself about the shoulder.

The cow sniffed up a little dust and blew it over his side. The baby elephant watched quietly from behind its mother. Half an hour later the elephant was dead.

"Truly the result of that fight meant a lot of easy meat for the hyenas and vultures," the *kil'ngozi* ended; "they should have salaamed to that baby elephant"—which was very much the native way of regarding such a tragedy.

"Your account of the cow-elephant trying to support her wounded mate interests me," I said. "I have heard of such things before."

The *kil'ngozi* nodded. "There was another time when I saw a thing like that," he said, and went on to describe how a white man with whom he was out hunting shot at and badly wounded an old bull-elephant, and the *kil'ngozi* was deputed to follow him.

When he caught up the elephant was staggering along, with a younger bull propping him up on either side.

The *kil'ngozi's* task was not to shoot the elephant—he had only his bow and arrows anyway—but to follow him and see where he died. The white man and the rest of the party came along slowly behind. The *kil'ngozi* indicated his direction by leaving bush signs, such as putting knots in the grass.

He tramped on after the elephant until night at

THE LORD OF THE JUNGLE

length compelled him to camp. In the morning he set off again, and after a mile or so came upon the elephant.

He was lying in a clear space—dead. The other elephant had gone, but all around the dead animal the ground was trampled flat, showing that a whole herd of the great animals had been there.

The reason of their congregation at this spot puzzled the *ki'ngozi*, until at length he noticed that the side and back of the dead elephant were covered with tusk marks. Whereupon he knew that when, finally, the animal had dropped, the rest of the herd had come up and, with their tusks, tried to lift him to his feet!

3

CHAPTER XII

KIL'NGOZI

THIS old *kil'ngozi*, at whose village I often stopped on my journeys, told me of another strange battle. It was in the Mgori river, he said, along the banks of which he was hunting one day. Presently, as he went along, he noticed a crocodile swimming very fast downstream through the rushing water.

This was a most unusual sight, for crocodiles do not like rushing water; it throws them about, and they are liable to hurt their stomachs on the rocks; their place is in the still reaches. A little way upstream was a great, still reach, with soft muddy banks, the home of large numbers of crocodiles; but for some reason this one had left it—couldn't get away fast enough, to judge from his pace.

A moment later the *kil'ngozi* saw another crocodile come shooting down the fast water, then another.

He stared in astonishment, clicking his tongue. Evidently some strange thing was happening in the still water of the reach upstream. Another crocodile came down the rushing water, but this one travelled more slowly than the others.

He was dead, with his belly up, and the water twisting and veering him as it bore him along. Once the water bumped him against a rock, and now and then shot him under the surface.

KIL'NGOZI

The *kil'ngozi* stared harder than ever. This crocodile had died in no ordinary way. His head was back at an unnatural angle, and, as it rolled over into an eddy near the bank, the man saw that the neck and base of the skull had been horribly crushed.

"*Ee—ee, kitu gani?*"¹ cried the *kil'ngozi*. Never had he seen anything like this before. He notched an arrow and started off up along the bank. As a hunter and a man wise in bushcraft and the ways of animals, he wanted to see what was happening.

He went along cautiously, his eyes and ears alert. Suddenly from ahead came a rushing sound, and he stepped aside just in time to dodge a crocodile making down along the bank as fast as he could.

The crocodile was badly wounded in one forearm, and was venting a kind of snarl. He took no notice of the man, but, with his mouth wide open, went on down the bank and entered the river.

More tense and alert than ever, the *kil'ngozi* went on. Then, as he neared the still water of the reach, there came to him a great sound of thrashing and splashing, and a grunting and blowing. Pressing on, he came to the reach, and at once the cause of the flight of the crocodiles was clear.

The crocodiles had been attacked by a herd of hippopotami!

Normally crocodiles and hippopotami will inhabit the same stretch of water without unduly interfering with one another; they keep their distances, so to speak. But on this occasion the hippos had swept down on to the crocodiles viciously and purposefully. The

¹ "What sort of thing is this?"

crocodiles had no chance against the monstrous jaws of the hippos.

The *kil'ngozi* was just in time to see the last of the crocodiles to be attacked by a hippo. The hippo, an enormous bull, had the crocodile jammed in against a place where the bank overhung the water a little. This overhang prevented the crocodile from getting away, and the hippo's tremendous mouth was making snapping rushes at him. The crocodile's tail threshed the water. He dodged and twisted. The hippopotamus made one tremendous chop after another at him. The rest of the hippo herd were all swimming up and down, nosing about the reach, looking for more crocodiles, and they made a great blowing and grunting.

Then, suddenly, the big bull-hippo's tremendous jaws caught the crocodile. He caught him right in the middle of his length, crushing the spine. The crocodile stiffened out, then trembled all over.

Snorting, the hippo backed away, opened his mouth, and the body of the crocodile slid limply out. It went drifting down the reach, floating and becoming submerged in turn, till at length it reached the lip of the fast water, where it hung a moment, then bobbed and disappeared. The attack of the hippopotami on the crocodiles was finished.

A little farther up the reach the *kil'ngozi* came to what was evidently the cause of all the trouble. It was the dead body of a baby hippo—a roundish pink shape, ballooned by internal gases, and caught up in a snag. All over its flanks and legs were tears and rips caused by crocodiles' teeth. The water here was shallow, and

KIL'NGOZI

a mother hippo was standing over the body, muzzling it and snorting distressfully.

The *kil'ngozi* conjectured that the baby hippo had died from some natural cause, probably while on the bottom of the river with his mother, and that in due time, swollen by internal gases, the body had floated off down the reach. Scenting the dead meat, the crocodiles had gone for it—pulling and worrying it. This had been too much for the mother, who was following. She had rushed in among the crocodiles, chopping at them with her great jaws. The rest of the hippo herd had rushed to her assistance, and the great attack on the crocodiles had begun; and the result was that not a crocodile remained in the reach.

I saw a good deal of this old *kil'ngozi*, and he told me a lot of bushcraft and animal lore. Some of the things I already knew; but some I heard then for the first time. One was how to purify foul water. The water at one particular place where I met the *kil'ngozi* was filthily dirty; it was from a water-hole that cattle had tramped in and tramped in; it was strongly impregnated with alkali; and it stank abominably. The usual method of digging a small pit near by and letting the water clear itself by filtering through did not seem to be effective on this occasion. The *kil'ngozi* offered to take the matter in hand, and, searching round about the water-hole, he eventually found a small single-stemmed plant with tiny oval, blue-grey leaves.

With a Masai sword that he always carried he dug up the plant, which proved to have an enormous root

—one far out of proportion to the size of the plant. It was shaped like a gnarled sausage. The *kil'ngozi* then took the skin off it, while my boys filled a couple of old petrol-drums with the filthy water from the hole. He next dipped the root in the water, stirring it round slowly some eight or ten times. He then removed the root.

In a few minutes the filth and stuff in the water began to sink, leaving the water crystal-clear above it. I tipped out some of this clear water and found it to be absolutely pure, with not even the faintest trace of the objectionable smell. The precipitation proceeded rapidly, and soon there was enough purified water in the drum for all our needs. The *kil'ngozi* gave me the root, and I used it as often as was needed. It never failed to act.

I have since found this plant with the water-purifying root near various water-holes, and used it with success. It is not plentiful, however, and I have frequently searched for it in vain.

We talked hunting 'shop,' that *kil'ngozi* and I. Just as two men in civilization, say in their club, will get to chatting over their mutual interests—the sporting results, the state of the pound, a play they've seen—so did the *kil'ngozi* and I talk hunting and bushcraft. We spoke of how in following big game—an elephant, for example—the sex of the animal can be told from the position of the urine it leaves on the trail. A male animal, having urinated, will almost always put a hind foot in the puddle as he moves on; a female cannot help leaving her urine untouched behind her.

KIL'NGOZI

We spoke of devices to attract the attention of animals, in order to bring them into shooting position or range. A sharp, loud whistle, for instance, will almost always cause a fleeing antelope to stop and look round. If, because of lack of cover, one is unable to get near an antelope in the ordinary way, a good trick is to lie down behind the last bit of cover and twirl one's hat round one's finger in such a position that the antelope can see it. This engages the animal's curiosity, and, as it is unaware of the presence of a man, it comes forward slowly to look. The *kil'ngozi* told of many instances where by this means he had attracted antelope so close to him that he was able to shoot them with his bow and arrows.

We spoke of how, when there are two hunters, animals can be approached across a clear space. One of the hunters stands in a position where the animals can see him clearly, and the other then stalks them, creeping low down in the grass, taking advantage of every little tuft. The animals, intent on watching the other man, do not see the stalker, and he is able to get right up to the required nearness. He has to be cunning, of course, for the least mistake is apt to betray him.

There is a device by which animals can be deceived into thinking that a man is something far less harmful—a tree or a gnarled stump. This *kil'ngozi* had used it quite a lot.

On one occasion he came out on a ridge-top which outlined him clearly against the sky to a fine herd of Grant's Gazelle down the slope on the other side. The hunter's luck had been out for some days, and his

AFRICA CALLING

people in the village were meat-hungry. One of the gazelle would be a godsend.

The *kil'ngozi* acted instantly; there was no reasoning or planning it out; it was purely his instinct working. He bent his knees and extended his arms crookedly. Outlined there against the sky, he no longer looked like a man. His attitude was not that of a man. He looked like a gnarled old tree-stump; his crookedly extended arms were like the limbs of a tree.

The herd of gazelle looked up. The wind was the wrong way for them, and they could not scent a man. They saw there on the ridge-top, against the sky, what they thought to be an old gnarled tree.

Reassured, one dropped his head and began to eat, then another and another. The *kil'ngozi* stayed motionless in his assumed pose. For a full two minutes perhaps he stayed thus. It was not until every member of the herd had his head down that at last he moved. Then it was to glide swiftly and soundlessly forward, his great object being to get off the ridge-top, go down the slope, and so no longer be outlined against the sky.

But after covering only a few yards he was compelled to assume his tree-like pose again.

Some of the gazelle had seen his movement out of the corners of their eyes—it was almost as if they had sensed it—and two or three heads went up, turned in the man's direction. Other heads went up; the whole herd stopped eating. Some of the animals, not sure what was the matter, looked this way and that, wonderingly.

KIL'NGOZI

The *kil'ngozi* kept perfectly still in his tree-like attitude. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to send the whole herd galloping off. It was not easy to maintain that motionless pose. He felt his bow slipping from its position at the back of his shoulder. Should it drop to the ground the gazelle would see the movement, and be off like the wind. Inch by inch it slipped. They were tense moments.

A mosquito buzzed in his ear. His ordinary impulse would have been to smack at it, but the hunter in him refrained. And, what was far worse, a tsetse flew round his head. Twice, three times, it circled his stationary crown, making a swift flurrying with its wings, then smacked straight down on to the back of his neck and bit him hard. The *kil'ngozi* had been prepared for this, but, all the same, it was almost as much as he could do not to start. The pain was intense. Thus he stood, until at length the gazelle had all assured themselves that there was no danger, and lowered their heads and resumed their feeding.

A few moments later he moved forward down the slope and off the skyline. With the safer background of the slope he now stalked the herd in the ordinary way, and it was not long before he had shot one of the gazelle with his bow and arrow.

We spoke of how, in stalking, it is always better to look round an obstruction than over it. To look over, say, a boulder is to break its outline, and thereby run great risk of attracting unwanted attention. To look round the boulder is to make no break of outline at all. Further, the whole of the top of the head is

exposed when one looks over the top of the boulder; whereas looking from the side of it exposes only a narrow slice, so to speak, of the face; not more than half the eye need go round.

We gossiped about 'sign'—how to leave information on the trail for the benefit of one's pals coming along behind. Placing one stone on top of another indicated the presence of water near by. Grass tied or knotted across a trail meant, "Do not go this way." We talked of how to tell from its spoor how long it was since an animal had passed along, the warmth or hardness of droppings being very helpful in this, especially in the case of elephant and buffalo. The sharpness or otherwise of the edges of footprints could also be made to determine this question of time.

I brought up the subject of elephant graveyards. I told how it is a belief among white men in civilized places that sick or aged elephants do not lie down and die wherever they happen to be, like other animals, but go off to a certain spot in the jungle which they all know of. If this was true, I pointed out, there would be an enormous store of ivory somewhere, and it would be well worth finding.

The old *kil'ngozi* shook his head and spat. That could not be, he said. He had been hunting many years now, but he had never seen anything like that. Elephant died just wherever they happened to be, like other animals. Once or twice he had seen two or three elephant dead in one place, but that was when there was a disease among them (he was referring to an outbreak of anthrax).

I nodded agreement; I knew quite well that the

KIL'NGOZI

story of the elephant graveyard was a myth, but I wanted to hear what such an experienced man of the bush had to say.

This old *kil'ngozi* was an expert in the use of poisoned weapons. One morning when we were out together I had an illustration of his skill in this direction. As we went along a wart-hog trotted across our path towards his hole. He hadn't seen us, and moved quite leisurely. He was an ugly-looking creature. His piggy face was covered with warts, like great knobs. Two great tusks curved in back towards his eyes. He looked very wiry and strong, and must have weighed seven stone or more. The hole was shallow and scarcely bigger than the animal. As he would be unable to turn round in it, he entered backward. There was something comic about the way he squeezed in stern first like that; his movements gave the impression that he wasn't at all keen on such an incongruous means of ingress, but, unhappily, there was nothing else for it. Despite his repulsive appearance, a wart-hog makes quite good eating, and the *kil'ngozi* prepared to get him.

Specially selecting one of his arrows, he fitted it to his bow. He then ordered one of the native boys who accompanied us to jump heavily on the top of the wart-hog's hole, so as to send the animal flying out.

The *kil'ngozi*, bow and arrow ready, took up a position facing the hole. I noticed he was very careful to avoid touching the tip of the arrow. The man on top of the hole jumped heavily, once, twice.

At the second jump the wart-hog came rushing out.

AFRICA CALLING

He headed straight in the direction of the *kil'ngozi*. The *kil'ngozi* let fly his arrow, and stepped aside. The wart-hog rushed on, full tilt—and within twenty yards rolled over, stone-dead.

The arrow had inflicted no heart-piercing or similar wound. It had merely flicked him on the jowl, making only the smallest scratch. That arrow was tipped with what must be one of the most virulent nerve-poisons extant.

CHAPTER XIII

GOING FISHING

IN the course of my roamings I did a good deal of fishing. As supplementary to, or as a change from, the ordinary diet of game, fish were always welcome. And often they were very easy to obtain. From the point of view of one who wants a fish or two to eat, African fishing is really wonderful, though for the Izaak Waltons who like to entice clever fish, dull fish, or sullen fish it is perhaps another matter.

Take a certain little spot at Jinja, the source of the Nile, the precise spot where that great river sets out from Lake Victoria on its long journey. The beginning of the Nile is a couple of the loveliest little water-falls that ever man saw, and at the bottom of these falls lie great fish—Nile perch, catfish, and others—in such quantity that they are fin to fin.

There they are, like the salmon, surging and striving to leap the falls, to reach their spawning grounds in the great lake. It is no small thing to watch a great twenty-pound fish make his torpedo-like rush straight up the green wall of falling water, corkscrewing his way up through the battering downpour, perhaps to fail at the very lip of the lake; whereupon he falls back exhausted, tumbles down and down, over and over, and at last into the quiet water, where he rests a while before making another try.

In their hundreds they go on thus, paying little heed

AFRICA CALLING

to numbers of otters that are busy among them all the time, plunging, diving, and biting at them. The fish have eyes for nothing but the falls and their top. They are certainly fine examples of persistence. A native with a spear can get enough fish for all hands in a very few minutes.

Elsewhere I often did the fishing myself, though by a method, I am afraid, which would cause strong, silent anglers to blanch. All I had was a stout sapling, a length of rawhide—or even some wiring from the truck—and a stout hook, on which I placed a juicy lump of buck meat. Then, removing my clothes, but retaining my hat, I perched on a rock in midstream, and there smoked, sang, and enjoyed myself generally while battling with crowds of catfish and others that queued up for their turn at the meat. Often I was hard put to it to keep myself and my rod on the rocky perch in a struggle with some monster fish. It was only by the greatest good luck—and straining of muscles—that I wasn't pulled in time after time.

One of my boys was not so fortunate. This boy was an ardent fisherman—a devotee of fishing as an art, not just as a means of getting a meal. He and I were sitting one evening fishing from neighbouring rocks. The first catch of the evening went to him—a small perch. With a superior smile, for my benefit, he left it on the hook and flung it back, as bait to attract bigger game. He attracted it all right. A few seconds later he uttered a sound like “Whup!” and I looked round to see him describing a parabola head first into the river, rod and all. He immediately scrambled out on to the bank, where he sat spouting

GOING FISHING

like a whale and lamenting the loss of his tackle. It was a crocodile that had snapped up the bait and pulled the fisherman into the water, and undoubtedly the boy had had a very narrow escape. But escaping with his life seemed to be of less account than the loss of his fishing tackle. He shook his black fist in the direction taken by the crocodile. "You thief—you!" he cried.

This native was absolutely mad on fishing. On Sundays, and on all occasions when he had time off, he would resort to the nearest river, or stream of any kind, and with home-made fishing gear spend many hopeful hours. On one of my journeys I had with me a friend who was a super-fisherman, and brought with him all the paraphernalia of his art—split-cane rods, reels, books of multi-coloured flies, lines of wonderful length and flexibility. This was too much for my fishing-loving boy; he followed my friend round like a dog, gaping at his elaborate and up-to-date tackle, and liked nothing better than to watch my friend gracefully flog the surface of a stream with slender, bending rod and coloured fly.

This friend, who was a very good fellow and had a real understanding of how a brother-fisherman feels, lent the boy a spare rod and some flies; and great were the fishing orgies the pair held. The boy did not catch as many fish by this means as he had previously caught with his home-made gear, but that did not worry him at all. The delicacy and art of this up-to-date fly-fishing absolutely absorbed him.

Nor did he abandon it when at length my friend departed, taking with him his rods and flies, but, with

AFRICA CALLING

a rod of his own devising and flies made from red and woollen yarn and metal buttons from my trousers, continued operations as enthusiastically as before.

In some places I got a lot of quiet fun from fishing for little fresh-water crabs on the beds of shallow streams. They were of no use as food, so I would collect them in a tin and throw them back. All that was necessary was to tie a piece of meat to a string and lower it through the shallow water till it was a couple of inches above the bottom.

Presently numbers of the crabs would come along and stand in a circle, studying the meat, but too timid to touch it. For a minute or two they would stand like this; then one of them, bolder than the rest, would creep right up, and give the meat a good nip.

Whereupon I would pull the string and raise the meat, and the crab would pull, seemingly not having the sense to let go, until he was drawn right up out of the water to the amazement, no doubt, of the rest of the tribe down below. I would then put him in the tin, where he would sit, blinking and looking foolish, and would lower the meat again, soon to draw another one up. The crabs never seemed to learn how foolish it was of them to hang on to the meat as they did; often, after I had emptied a crab out of the tin back into the water, I caught him over again.

I remember one day catching the grandfather of all the crabs in this manner. I had lowered the meat, and the usual circle of crabs had gathered, and there was the usual timid waiting, when suddenly along swaggered this very large old crab.

He shouldered the others aside very much in the

GOING FISHING

manner of some pompous old clubman making for the lunch-room. Reaching the meat, he paused and looked about him, as much as to say, "I can't understand what you fellows are waiting for." Then, with an air of condescension, he reached up a podgy claw and gripped the meat—only to be drawn up, his whiskers stiff with indignation, out of sight of his no doubt highly amused fellows. I placed him in a tin with a number of his poor relatives, and when at length I emptied the contents back into the water, and the pompous old crab went scuttling off along the bottom of the stream to join his fellows, it seemed to me that there was about him a definitely chastened air.

The natives, of course, had their own ways of fishing. These came under three heads—line, arrow, and net. The line was used chiefly in deep-water fishing from canoes on the lakes. Grubs, slugs, and worms were used as bait, and sometimes maize dough. The lines were mostly obtained from Indian traders, but on occasion I found them using rawhide and sheep-sinews. Many natives made a good living by fishing on the lakes.

The fishing arrow I often saw used on the upper reaches of the Nile. It was essentially a canoe sport. The fisherman in each case was armed with a bow and a number of thin arrows, heavily barbed, and having a long thin line attached to the butt end. Maize dough or other bait was thrown on the water to attract fish up from the depths.

When at length a big fish rose to gulp at the bait from just under the surface the marksman took careful aim, and *twang*—the fish was transfixed. The fish

AFRICA CALLING

was then played, and finally brought to the canoe. Great judgment was needed in shooting the arrow into the fish as he rose to the bait; not only had the quick movements of the fish to be allowed for, but the deflecting power of the water from the moment the arrow entered it. In this matter of shooting through water those arrow-fishermen displayed great skill indeed.

Net-fishing on the lakes was done by partially enclosing a shallow inlet with a wall of nets, made from raffia or papyrus. The whole village then assembled, men, women, and children, and waded in, shouting, booing, screaming, up and down the inlet, driving the fish into the meshes of the net. Catfish were very commonly caught in large numbers in this way; the shape of their gills caused them to be easily meshed once they touched the net.

This fishing *en masse* was always a scene of great excitement. The people appeared to regard it more as a game than anything else. The younger folk splashed one another and held mimic fights, and the older ones interlarded their shouting with jokes. I remember once seeing a skinny old man—stark naked, as they all were—who pretended to be trying to walk on the surface of the water. Every now and then he threw up his arms in mock despair. Those about him shouted with laughter. The skinny old man was evidently a bit of a comedian.

He was not the only funny person present, though. Near by a trio of plump young girls rhythmically lifted their bodies out of the water and sank them again in imitation of the way hippos behave. Where the imitation failed, however, was that, while hippos

GOING FISHING

do this rising and sinking with great solemnity, the girls could not keep their faces straight for more than a minute, but constantly burst into shrieks of laughter.

So among others of that village-full of people out there in the water did comic and light-hearted scenes take place. As I watched them it came to me strongly that these folk, primitive and all as they were, had got hold of a philosophical truth of great value. They knew how to make a game of the business of getting a meal. If only civilized folk could make getting a living a game, instead of the grim affair it only too often is!

Being in such numbers, these people were in little danger from crocodiles; the general uproar frightened the saurians. But when only a few people fished thus there was always danger. On one occasion I came to the camp of a miner, one of whose boys had been taken while fishing in a river near by. The miner and I decided to get even with the crocodiles.

Armed with rifles, and sticks of gelignite to which were attached short fuses, all ready for 'spitting'—that is, igniting—we went along the river-bank.

Crocodiles lay about the bank, basking, and on hearing us coming slid off into the water and lay still on the bottom. This was what we wanted. Coming opposite where they were, we lit the fuses and threw in the explosive. As it reached the bottom it went off, making a deep *whuuuuuf* sound, and sending a great heaving motion through the water.

A moment's stillness followed, then in ones and twos the crocs came darting up out of the water and rushing on to the bank.

AFRICA CALLING

The explosion had sent them silly. They went round and round, not unlike dogs snapping at their own tails. One or two swam round awkwardly on the surface of the water a few moments before making for the bank. All made loud chopping noises with their jaws.

They made easy targets for our rifles. We put in only a couple of hours bombing the crocodiles in this manner in the various pools of the river, but in that couple of hours we shot twenty-nine. Their bodies made a fine smell on the river bank for weeks afterwards.

Only once have I come across a native who did not regard a crocodile as his bitter enemy. This was on the shore of Victoria Nyanza, and the native was a middle-aged man who promised to show me something very wonderful about a crocodile if I would buy one of a number of chickens he had in his hut near by and give it back to him.

I did so, paying a high price for the bird, and the man sent a loud call out over the lake. In a minute or two the water broke, and a crocodile appeared, and came swimming right near to where we stood on the shore. The native broke the squawking chicken's wings and legs and threw it to the crocodile, which had its jaws open and waiting.

With the bird in his mouth the saurian turned and disappeared; and the native informed me that in the olden days human beings were given to the crocodiles at that very spot, their arms and legs being broken so that they could not swim or resist. He informed me, also, that it was always the same crocodile that answered his call, and declared him to be very old,

GOING FISHING

very old indeed—in fact, the same crocodile that came for the human victims of olden days—and that when he answers the call now it is in the hope that the thing to be thrown to him will be a man. All of which may or may not be true; all I know is that by charging a high price for the chickens the native made quite a good living out of the crocodile.

Other fishing I did was on the sea-coast, where on various occasions in the course of my roamings I found myself. Once, with the boy whom I have mentioned as such a zealous devotee of the fishing art, I pulled up at a place called Lamu. After a talk with some Arab dhow-masters and others at the quay my boy came back to me with eyes sparkling and tales of monster sharks that cruised the bay, seeing what they might devour. His whole attitude was an eloquent appeal for a fishing trip, to try conclusions with some of these monsters.

His sheer delight when I consented was that of a little child. I approached the Arab owner of a dhow, and arranged terms for a little cruise in the bay, and returned to camp to find my boy busy fitting barbs on two enormous meat-hooks which he had obtained somewhere—dishonestly, I fear.

Next morning, armed with the hooks, a quantity of strong rope, and a whole reed-buck for bait, we set forth. My boy was on the fishing expedition of his dreams, and stood at the bow, sniffing the breeze like a war-horse. Out in the bay we dropped our baited hook astern and fastened the end of the rope to the mast. I left my boy to watch the water for tell-tale fins, while the Arab master and I sat on the hatch

AFRICA CALLING

The explosion had sent them silly. They went round and round, not unlike dogs snapping at their own tails. One or two swam round awkwardly on the surface of the water a few moments before making for the bank. All made loud chopping noises with their jaws.

They made easy targets for our rifles. We put in only a couple of hours bombing the crocodiles in this manner in the various pools of the river, but in that couple of hours we shot twenty-nine. Their bodies made a fine smell on the river bank for weeks afterwards.

Only once have I come across a native who did not regard a crocodile as his bitter enemy. This was on the shore of Victoria Nyanza, and the native was a middle-aged man who promised to show me something very wonderful about a crocodile if I would buy one of a number of chickens he had in his hut near by and give it back to him.

I did so, paying a high price for the bird, and the man sent a loud call out over the lake. In a minute or two the water broke, and a crocodile appeared, and came swimming right near to where we stood on the shore. The native broke the squawking chicken's wings and legs and threw it to the crocodile, which had its jaws open and waiting.

With the bird in his mouth the saurian turned and disappeared; and the native informed me that in the olden days human beings were given to the crocodiles at that very spot, their arms and legs being broken so that they could not swim or resist. He informed me, also, that it was always the same crocodile that answered his call, and declared him to be very old,

GOING FISHING

very old indeed—in fact, the same crocodile that came for the human victims of olden days—and that when he answers the call now it is in the hope that the thing to be thrown to him will be a man. All of which may or may not be true; all I know is that by charging a high price for the chickens the native made quite a good living out of the crocodile.

Other fishing I did was on the sea-coast, where on various occasions in the course of my roamings I found myself. Once, with the boy whom I have mentioned as such a zealous devotee of the fishing art, I pulled up at a place called Lamu. After a talk with some Arab dhow-masters and others at the quay my boy came back to me with eyes sparkling and tales of monster sharks that cruised the bay, seeing what they might devour. His whole attitude was an eloquent appeal for a fishing trip, to try conclusions with some of these monsters.

His sheer delight when I consented was that of a little child. I approached the Arab owner of a dhow, and arranged terms for a little cruise in the bay, and returned to camp to find my boy busy fitting barbs on two enormous meat-hooks which he had obtained somewhere—dishonestly, I fear.

Next morning, armed with the hooks, a quantity of strong rope, and a whole reed-buck for bait, we set forth. My boy was on the fishing expedition of his dreams, and stood at the bow, sniffing the breeze like a war-horse. Out in the bay we dropped our baited hook astern and fastened the end of the rope to the mast. I left my boy to watch the water for tell-tale fins, while the Arab master and I sat on the hatch

boards and talked about seagoing and cargo, also the difficulty these hard times of making much at smuggling—an activity, it seemed, upon which he was accustomed to rely.

Presently my boy began to leap up and down like a jack-in-the-box and point to a big black fin circling in the trail of the bait. "Ee—ee, *bwana*—just look at that!" whispered the boy excitedly.

. A moment later the fin darted in, and the rope tautened like a bow-string; the shark was hooked. My boy, in his excitement, tripped, and fell over backward into the well of the dhow. He was soon up and back at a point of vantage, however.

The shark set up a terrible threshing and churning of the water, so that I wondered the rope did not break. My boy, the crew, and myself took hold of the rope and pulled with all our strength, to get as much slack on board as we could, to give us playing room. To and fro the shark fought, now close to the dhow, now away from it. The rope fairly whistled through our palms, taking the skin off mine. At last, after twenty minutes, he began to tire, and allowed himself to be dragged alongside the dhow, where he was transfixed with a boat-hook and kept there, struggling.

My boy, his eyes starting from his head at the sight of his first fourteen-foot fish, was hanging over the side in a state of seething excitement. Something had to happen—and it did. He lost his grip on the slippery gunwale, and fell over the side—straight on top of the struggling shark. A thrill of horror ran through me, for though this boy was a star-spangled idiot in many ways, he had been with me on many expeditions and

GOING FISHING

through many dangers, and I was fond of the fool, and did not like to think of him dying in this manner.

He was right on top of the shark's head, and its wicked jaws were snapping at him.

I yelled. We all yelled, and some one threw a rope. The boy grasped it—just in time to avoid a tremendous snap of the shark's jaws, which would surely have got him had he remained where he was another second—and scrambled up on deck, skinned from ankle to hip, where his body had rubbed against the rough, hard hide of the shark.

Half a dozen cuts over the head with a native sword gave the shark his quietus. He was too heavy to haul on board without proper tackle, so in the end we cut him loose, and he drifted belly up down the bay, until at last other sharks arrived, and the body began to twist and turn as they tore at it. My boy watched the scene with intense emotion. To have caught such a fish, and yet be compelled to let him go, was the tragedy of his life.

(Readers of my first book, *Claws of Africa*, may be interested to know that this boy was the one named Angel Gabriel, who figures considerably in that volume.)

CHAPTER XIV

THE WAIF

ONE day, in the course of my cotton-carrying work with the motor-truck along the Uganda-Congo border, I witnessed a somewhat curious incident. At one of the villages I found the people much concerned about a strange child who had just arrived. This child was a small native boy about six years old, and the people were anxious to have nothing to do with him. He was almost naked, and he looked starved. As he stood there in the gateway of the village he mumbled, half crying, that he wanted food—"My stomach is hungry" is a literal translation of what he said.

A large number of the people were standing round, and, while their expressions were not altogether unkind, it was clear that they wanted to have nothing to do with him. A group of women moved back as the child made to approach. They looked uneasy.

A young man cried out to the child to go away. "You cannot come in here!" he said. Another man waved at him to depart.

The child held out one little black hand for food, and with the other rubbed his tear-wet eyes. One of the older men went towards him and sternly told him to go. There was great finality in his tone. Some of the people nodded their heads approvingly. Others merely stared. A woman produced a mealie cob and thrust it into the child's hand. One of the men put a

THE WAIF

hand on his shoulder and turned him about. "Now go!" he ordered.

Clutching his mealie cob tightly, the child went stumbling along the hot and dusty road.

Now, it was not like natives to treat children harshly. Normally they were very fond of children, and it would have been far more in keeping with their character if they had taken that child in and cared for him.

But it appeared that in this particular district the people had an old superstition concerning lost or abandoned children. I had no difficulty in learning all about it from them; they were anxious to justify their apparent harshness.

There were, they said, certain bad gods just over the border in the Congo who took on the likeness of a child and, pretending to be strayed, came to the villages and asked to be taken in and succoured. But woe betide the villagers who took in these bad gods disguised as children! The gods disguised themselves in this way only in order to bring pestilence to the people and the cattle, and destruction to the crops. Many times had this happened. The people of all the villages in this region knew how dangerous it was to take in a waif. Always had they known it, and their fathers before them. Of course, it might be that a child was really lost, and was not a masquerading bad god at all; but how were the people to know?

I remarked that it would be damn' bad luck for a real waif; and, continuing my journey, soon caught up with the poor little creature.

AFRICA CALLING

He was wandering alone, a tiny, dusty figure, alternately sniffing and gnawing at his mealie cob. He was utterly disconsolate. Every now and again he kicked up the dust with his bare toe. I stopped the truck and looked down at him. He scowled back at me. His attitude was that he felt the whole world was against him. The dust on his little face was marked with tear runnels.

"What is it all about?" I asked him, in the Kingwana tongue, which is widely spoken in the Congo, and is very like Swahili. One of my boys repeated the question to him, and the child, sniffing, replied to the effect that everything was wrong.

He was hungry—he was thirsty—he had no home—he had no father or mother. The people of the last village had chased him away: the people of the village before that had done likewise. He had come a long way: he was very tired. "Where are you going?" asked my native.

"*Sijui*,"¹ answered the child.

I looked at the poor little devil again. It was impossible to leave him to go along like this. Who he was, where he had come from, or what had happened to him, I could find out later. Meanwhile I would take him along with me. I nodded to my boys, and one of them reached down and gripped the child by the arm and hoisted him up into the truck. A drink from a bottle of cold tea was given him, and some food, after which he curled up on top of some sacks and, soothed by the motion of the truck, soon was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

¹ "I don't know."

That night in camp the boys got his story from him, and in the morning one of them told it to me. The boy who told it to me was from a region away to the east, and considered himself far superior to the natives of this district, with their superstitions about bad gods masquerading as children.

"They are ignorant savages to believe such things!" he cried.

The child was far from being a god, bad or good, he went on. He was merely an ordinary little child. His home was in the Congo, just over the border. But some bad things had happened there.

"What kind of bad things?" I asked.

The native shook his head. He didn't know exactly, he said. It was something the child did not understand. All that the child knew was that his father did not want him any more, and had chased him away from the village. He did not know where his mother was. His father was fearfully angry, it seemed. The child had gone off along the road from the village, wandering aimlessly, and after a time had come across some natives who were going over the border into Uganda. To them he had attached himself. On the Uganda side he seemed somehow to have lost sight of the natives, and had gone off wandering alone.

"That is his story, *bwana*," said my native. "He has been wandering thus now for three days. Truly his father must be a savage of a man to have cast him out like that."

That evening I camped near the hut of a prospector I knew, and told him the story of the unwanted child

AFRICA CALLING

—unwanted by his father for some unknown reason, and unwanted in these Uganda villages for the extraordinary reason that he might be a treacherous and evil-working god in disguise. On my adding that I didn't quite know what to do with the little beggar the prospector, who was a kindly man, offered to take charge of him. "He can help my cook-boy with peeling the spuds and scraping out the pots," he said. "It will be some sort of home for the poor little devil, anyway."

So I left the child with him, and resumed my journey next morning, glad that the incident had ended so satisfactorily. I should have liked much to know, however, why he had been so ruthlessly cast out of his own village. As I have already remarked, natives are usually very fond of their children, and an act such as this was difficult to understand. It was hardly possible that in his own village he had been regarded as a masquerading devil; only strange, strayed children were so regarded. Besides, it was the child's own father who had driven him forth. Everything was very mysterious.

It was not till some weeks later, when I camped at the prospector's on my return trip, that I heard the whole story.

"That little black kid you left here—you've just missed him," said the prospector. "Some of his people came looking for him, and he left with them for his home in the Congo only this morning. I got them to tell me why his father had driven him out and all about it. It's a queer story."

As we sat at our evening meal together he told it to

me, and now I set it forth in my own words, changing only the names of the people involved.

The villain of the piece was a man called Nyoka. Nyoka was a nickname, meaning "the Snake." This villain was much given to fits of sullen brooding and bursts of cold ferocity. He was greatly feared in his village, and, being rich as natives go, exercised considerable power.

Now, one of the elders of the tribe had a daughter—young and beautiful, with firm, rounded breasts and an upright figure. She was twelve years old, and therefore ready for marriage. Her name was Matama.

Nyoka had had his eye on her for a long time, and had it well in mind to buy her as his latest wife.

But the girl had a lover, a young warrior from a neighbouring village. His name was Usoga, and he was wonderful to look upon—slim and with the muscles of an impala. They made an attractive couple as they wandered through the thick forest together, their arms entwined, their heads close. Every day they met thus and walked together. They were as much in love as natives can be.

Like every one else in the village, Nyoka knew this, but it made no difference to him. Though he had two wives already—both young, but cowed into trembling submission—he wanted the girl Matama with all the desire of his dark soul, and was determined to get her.

Accordingly, one evening he went to her father's house, and announced curtly that he had come to arrange to purchase the girl Matama in marriage. The

girl's father, afraid to displease the powerful Nyoka in any way, slowly nodded assent. A price in cows, sheep, and salt was agreed upon, and Nyoka went away satisfied.

Matama was sent for and informed of her fate. She raised no particular objections. As a native girl she could expect nothing better than to be bought by him who would pay the most. Her lover was poor, and could not buy her—and that was all there was to that. She would become Nyoka's latest wife. She would be the favourite, and the rougher and harsher work of the household and the fields would be left to the other two wives. Undoubtedly there were certain advantages in being the wife of Nyoka.

But deep down in her heart she had no intention of giving up her Usoga, her lover. She would have to meet him secretly, but no doubt it could be done.

The marriage ceremony duly took place—it was not elaborate; with these particular natives such ceremonies seldom are—and immediately the marriage price was paid Matama was established in a new hut, next to the one occupied by her lord and master, Nyoka.

Matama soon found that life as the wife of Nyoka was far from pleasant. Nyoka's passion for her amounted almost to a mania; his physical desire seemed insatiable. Further, he was given to fits of jealousy which found their outward expression in his beating the girl unmercifully with a rhinoceros-hide whip.

And not only that, but Matama discovered that Nyoka was a ritual cannibal and a member of a

THE WAIF

notorious secret society, among whose practices were the digging up of corpses and carrying them off to some secret place in the forest. Weird tales were told of this secret place—of fearful incantations, of a hideously garbed witch-doctor, of corpses that sat up and spoke through decaying jaws, and of ghastly feasts that were made of the corpses afterwards, their hearts, brains, and other organs being devoured by men who desired to possess themselves of certain of the qualities which the dead men were supposed to have had in life. Nyoka was one of the leaders of this society, and spent whole nights at a time at the terrible ceremonies in the secret place in the forest.

Matama very soon came to loathe him with a great loathing, and more and more she thought of her lover, the young Usoga. On the nights that Nyoka went to the meetings of the secret society in the jungle she sent word to Usoga, who came to her, and they spent long, love-filled hours together.

The people of the village knew about this, but none said anything to Nyoka, for no one liked the man, fearing him. In their hearts they were glad that his ill-treated young wife was having at least a little happiness.

At length Matama conceived, and in due time a son was born. Nyoka was pleased that the child was a son, and not a daughter, but otherwise he paid little attention to it. The boy was a great delight, however, to Matama, and it made her glad indeed as the years went by to see how well he was growing. Meanwhile she clung more and more to that other great delight

in her life—Usoga, her lover. Nyoka was now going more frequently than ever to the secret place in the forest, and for this Matama was glad; it meant all the more nights for her to spend with Usoga. And still no one said anything to Nyoka.

But Nyoka found out at last. It was not a thing that could be kept quiet for ever. Perhaps it was something that Matama said in an unguarded moment that first aroused Nyoka's suspicions. She may even have talked in her sleep. One night, therefore, he pretended to go off into the forest as usual—but after a little while returned, and discovered Matama and Usoga together. They were strolling along a path near the village, their arms entwined, their heads close together in lover talk.

In spite of their preoccupation, however, they saw Nyoka at the same moment as he saw them. Nyoka raised a spear, and undoubtedly it would have pierced Matama's breast had not her lover swung her aside. The next instant Usoga picked her up in his strong young arms and plunged with her into the thickness of the forest, where in the darkness Nyoka could not follow.

Nyoka was nearly mad with rage. He roared curses into the forest after them, and swore to be avenged. Coming to the place where he had surprised them, he saw an arrow on the ground. It was one of Usoga's, a poisoned arrow such as most hunters carried, and Usoga must have dropped it as he swung Matama aside.

An idea came to Nyoka. He picked up the arrow, and went to the village—into Matama's hut. He came

THE WAIF

out carrying a kind of apron which she had been accustomed to wear. Some of the elders and others were squatting and chatting round a fire, and Nyoka told them how he had surprised Matama and Usoga and what he was going to do.

Filled with cold fury, he held up Matama's apron and Usoga's arrow. He was going to have the *dawa* put on them, he said. He knew a powerful witch-doctor who would do it, and the next morning he would go off to him in his place in the forest. All that the witch-doctor needed would be something belonging to each of the two people. Well, here were the two things—Matama's apron and Usoga's arrow. With these objects in his possession the witch-doctor would put a *dawa* on the lovers, so that they would begin to shrivel up, and go on shrivelling up, till at length they died in great agony.

For long he went on talking like this ; and the people were much afraid for Matama and Usoga, hiding somewhere out there in the darkness of the bush, for witch-doctors were powerful, and could easily do this thing.

All through the night Nyoka sat thinking about the revenge he was going to take on Matama and Usoga, and no one went near him, because he was so angry. Matama and Usoga came not back, but stayed out there in the bush.

In the morning Nyoka went and aroused Matama's child.

"Out you go!" he cried. "I do not want you! I do not think you are my son at all! Away you go—out of this village, and come not back!"

AFRICA CALLING

The six-years-old boy looked at him in fear and surprise, and whimpered, and asked for his mother. But Nyoka took him and turned him round and kicked him, so that he went running away through and between the huts. And every time he stopped and looked back there was Nyoka, ready to follow and kick him again. So he ran out on to the road, and wandered off along it.

Nyoka watched the child till he was out of sight, then went to his own hut and slung his bow on to his shoulder and buckled on his short sword. After picking up Matama's apron and Usoga's arrow he went out.

"I go now to the great witch-doctor, to have the evil *dawa* put upon these two!" he cried to some of the villagers who stood around. His eyes were red with rage, and very evil indeed he looked. "Hiding in the bush will not protect them! The power of the *dawa* goes everywhere, and cannot be escaped!"

Nyoka then started off, making between the huts, straight towards the forest; and the people were again sorry for Matama and her lover Usoga, very sorry indeed.

But before him as he strode along there appeared the figure of a woman among the trees at the edge of the bush. It was Matama, and she was dodging from tree to tree, trying to reach her hut unseen. She had come for her child.

Nyoka stopped. He flung down Matama's apron and unslung his bow. The watching villagers could clearly see how twisted and evil was the expression on

his face. He forgot about the *dawa*. He fitted Usoga's poisoned arrow to his bow, and drew back the bow-string.

Matama stood still. It was no use fleeing: the distance between Nyoka and herself was only a few yards, and it was impossible that he should miss. A rustle, and Usoga bounded from the bush near by, and made to fling himself at Nyoka. Aiming straight at Matama's breast, Nyoka angrily jerked back the bow-string a little farther—and broke it!

Instead of shooting the arrow forward, the straightening of the bow—through the string's breaking—jerked the arrow backward; and one of its sharp, poisoned barbs pricked Nyoka's wrist.

Nyoka gave a great cry, and fell back against the wall of one of the huts. The poison was quick, and presently he sank to the ground, and the people carried him into his hut. In half an hour he was unconscious, and before sundown that day he was dead.

"That's the story of it," said the prospector. "Usoga and some of the other villagers immediately went in search of the child, but the kid had picked up with the travelling natives by this time, and had come over the border with them here into Uganda, and it wasn't easy to find him. But bit by bit they traced him—hearing about him, for example, at the villages where he had been chased away for fear of his being a possible bad god or devil in disguise—and finally found him here. His mother now lives happily with Usoga."

It had all turned out well. The only snag was the

AFRICA CALLING

child. He didn't want to go back home. It didn't comfort him to be told that Nyoka was no longer there to beat him. He wanted to stay with the prospector. He cried and kicked, and in the end Usoga had to pick him up and bodily carry him off. He had become used to the contact with European life, as represented by the prospector's camp, and liked it very much.

CHAPTER XV

BUSHED

IN a Tanganyika district to which I was carrying some machinery for one of the mines I had the very nasty experience of being lost in the bush.

It was an odd affair. There was I, an accomplished bushman, losing myself as thoroughly as the rawest tenderfoot. But Africa is like that. In certain types of country it is possible to be hopelessly lost within a couple of hundred yards of one's camp.

I know of an instance when a lost man wandered about miserably for three hours, in and out the trees, round and round, all the while in full sight of his boys in the camp. He was only found, as it were, when one of the boys strolled over and, rather wonderously, asked what he was looking for!

It sounds absurd that a man should behave like that, but those familiar with the African bush know how easy it is.

There is a type of country, called *kampi nyota* (or camp of stars), that is completely bewildering because of the sameness of its features. Everywhere is gently undulating ground crossed and criss-crossed with small watercourses and small low trees all of the same height. Each undulation of the ground looks exactly like the others; the watercourses seem all to twist in the same way, the trees all seem to have the same gnarled limbs or bent trunks.

There is such a lack of distinguishing, or different, features that, travelling through this country, one is constantly haunted by a sense of coming back to, or remaining in, the same place.

It is uncanny, and, particularly if one is alone, the temptation to lose one's head is great. Even if not lost at all a man may easily believe that he is completely bushed—imagine that he is going round in a circle—and in the end become frantic perhaps.

But even if a man is able to retain his general sense of direction it will still be difficult for him, where all trees look alike and not one is sufficiently higher than the others to afford a good view from its top, to find his camp. When hunting in this type of country I either took with me a native whom I knew to be possessed of a 'direction sense'—an instinct for direction something like that possessed by, say, a homing pigeon—or else I blazed, or made other marks on, the trees as I went along, which line of marks I had merely to follow in order to get back to the camp.

I have never known anyone more fully endowed with this 'direction sense' than a native porter I once employed. On one occasion when I was caught out late in this confusing *kampi nyota* country he undertook to lead the way straight through it in the dark. The district was new to him, and the darkness like pitch; but with his wonderful sixth sense the native led the way without hesitation, in and out the trees, straight across-country for three miles into the camp. Knowing the bush as I did, I regarded the feat as a miracle.

Then there is the *nyika*, or thorn-bush, country—

BUSHED

completely flat country, covered with thorn-bushes about twice the height of a man. It is terribly bewildering; and it was in this country that I so badly lost myself.

I had gone out alone one early morning to do a bit of shooting for the pot. Game seemed to be scarce, and for some little way I went on without seeing a sign. Intent on picking up the trail of some animal, I did not take any particular note of my direction.

At last I came on the fresh spoor of an impala, and, encouraged thereby, I quickened my pace, and, after about half an hour's tracking, came in sight of the animal. It was grazing, and quite unaware of my presence, and I had little difficulty in stalking and shooting it. I then proceeded to skin the animal, and while doing so it suddenly occurred to me that I had not the least notion of the direction in which my camp lay. I remembered that, very foolishly, I had made no note of the direction in coming along, nor noticed even the angle of the sun or which way the wind was coming from.

Naturally I was very much alarmed. Then, telling myself that the first thing to do was to keep calm—saying it several times over—I finished the skinning, made a pack of as much of the meat as I could conveniently carry, and set off on the trip back. Perhaps it would not prove so difficult after all, for my tracks showed clearly enough in the sandy soil, and I had only to follow them in order to reach the camp.

Winding in and out among the thorn-bushes, I went along. Here and there the soil was harder, and the tracks were so faint that I had difficulty in following

AFRICA CALLING

them; in one or two places I feared I had lost them altogether. What made things more difficult was that my course had not been in anything like a straight line, but a circuitous wandering, as I had followed the grazing animal's trail. It was with great relief that I finished at last with this patch of harder ground and picked up the tracks again.

For some little time I went on thus; then the tracks once more began to grow faint. This time it was not because of the hardness of the ground, but because a wind had sprung up, and was gradually blowing the sand in and about the tracks so as to hide them.

This was much more serious than a mere patch of hard ground. It meant that if the wind continued the tracks would soon be obliterated entirely. I anxiously studied the force of the wind, watched for signs of its lessening.

But no such signs came. Instead, the wind grew not only stronger, but gusty, and the gusts swirled the sand in a way that filled in and obliterated the tracks faster and more completely than ever. I hurled curse after curse at that wind. There was something about the whole humiliating business of being lost that got on the nerves badly. Whenever a gust obliterated a footprint right before my eyes I let forth an oath such as few provocations have ever drawn from me.

Presently the last of the footprints disappeared. My plight was serious indeed. It was mid-morning by this time, and, with the sun mounting in the sky, I was rapidly losing sense of even the general direction in which the camp lay. I had absolutely nothing to

go on. My camp was situated at an isolated water-hole, and not near some stream-bed that might have given me a line on which way to go in the event of my coming to it; I should then at least have known that the camp was either up or down the stream.

I raised my rifle and fired a shot, hoping that it would be heard at the camp. A little later I fired again. Having only one more cartridge left after that, I did not fire further; it would never do to be completely without ammunition. (As I learned later, the shots were wasted anyway; I was miles from the camp when I fired them, and their sound was not heard.)

A great feeling of fear began to rise in me. Instances I had known of men being lost flashed before me. I remembered an expedition in Tanganyika when, incredible though it may sound, a man with a two-ton lorry was lost in the bush, and never heard of again. It struck me forcibly that a bush that could do a thing like that was terribly dangerous, and that I should have to be damn' careful indeed. Then I thought, "All my care may not be of any use."

This, fortunately, I recognized as a symptom of panic. Whereupon I promptly sat down in the shade of a thorn-bush and rested. Panic is the lost man's worst enemy. Above all things he must keep his head. To become panicky is to reduce to a minimum one's chances of getting through.

For some time I sat there in the shade of the bush. The day was getting hot, and it was advisable that I should stay there quietly till the sun was well past the meridian and the heat lessening. It is only the tender-foot who toils on in the heat of the day, even if he is

AFRICA CALLING

thirsty and feels that he must have water at once, which is how I was beginning to feel. There is nothing like a blazing hot sun overhead to drop a man, especially if he is carrying a load.

When at length I started off again I decided to follow the first game trail I should find, for game trails as a rule lead to or from water, and it was possible that this one would take me to the water-hole near which my camp was situated.

Accordingly, when, a little later, I came across a nice broad trail with recent tracks on it all pointing in one direction, I set out along it—but in the opposite direction to that taken by the game. This was because it was but reasonable to suppose that the animals had watered the night before, and that this trail was of their returning to their feeding grounds. To ‘back-trail’ them in this manner is what any bushman or hunter in my position would have done.

It was a mistake, none the less, for after following the trail thus for two full hours I found that it merely thinned out and divided into smaller side-trails. The trail was of no use at all. The mistake lay in the fact that I had followed the tracks of a herd of migrating animals, merely passers-through, and not those of local game coming from an accustomed watering-place.

On discovering this I sat down and rested again. The old feeling of irritation was upon me again. I cursed the game trail that had given me such a long and useless tramp, also the animals that had made it. By this time I was miserably thirsty; my tongue and palate were quite dry and rough, and my lips felt

like cracking. I would have given anything for a good long drink of water; I thought longingly of cool rivers on whose banks I had rested at various times, tinkling waterfalls, and long glasses filled with iced lager. I know of no recollections that could have been more tantalizing and cruel.

To make things a little easier I jettisoned most of the impala meat, keeping only a couple of steaks wrapped in pieces of the hide. Then I rose and remarched the whole distance I had covered along the trail—that is, I followed in the same direction as that of the animals' spoor.

Hour after hour I went along thus, growing thirstier and thirstier. The dryness of my mouth seemed complete; there seemed to be no moisture there at all. I was constantly striving to force the glands into at least some semblance of activity, to make them deposit even a few drops of saliva. My tongue was swelling. Little dark spots and odd red flashes showed frequently before my eyes.

I tried to guess from the appearance of the spoor how long it would be before I came to water—the water that the animals would undoubtedly have reached by now. There was no way that I knew of telling from the spoor; still, I tried to guess and estimate. I recalled the case of a man I knew who had died from thirst in the bush; in an attempt to relieve his sufferings he had crammed a portion of his shirt into his mouth. Maybe his sufferings had driven him insane. Thirst was the very devil for driving people insane. I recalled all this with trembling vividness, and wondered if such a fate would be mine. I did

AFRICA CALLING

not want to think of such things, and wished I wouldn't think of them. But somehow I couldn't help myself. I seemed to have no control.

I plodded doggedly on. It was nearly dark by this time, and it was all I could do to follow the trail. What would happen when it became really dark, and I could no longer see it, I did not dare to think.

And then suddenly I smelled water! The smell of it came to me down-wind from straight ahead.

It was the most wonderful thing in the world to me, that scent of water! I trembled as I pressed on. I swallowed hard. A quick throbbing was at my heart from the excitement of it. The water was not far off, and I believe I ran the last few yards.

It was a water-hole, but not the one near which my camp was situated. But that did not matter in the least just then. It was water I wanted—and there it was! Thirsty as I was, however, I could not drink it straight away. The stuff was indescribably filthy, a dirty grey mass through having been tramped in and stirred up by drinking animals, and full of droppings. There was nothing for it but to curb my thirst a little longer, while I performed the old bush trick of digging a hole with my knife in the ground at the side of the water-hole and letting the liquid filter through. The little time of waiting was horrible, but the much purer condition of the water thus obtained well repaid me.

After a drink—sufficient, but not too much—I retreated to some bushes and lit a little fire, over which I roasted one of the impala steaks on a wooden spit. What with being carried all through the heat of

BUSHED

the day and bumped about on my back, the meat had become marvellously tender, and the meal was really a good one. Afterwards I lit a satisfying cigarette and felt better about things. I told myself that matters could have been much worse. At any rate, I had water, food, and something to smoke.

It was, of course, impossible to go on in the darkness, so I decided to sleep where I was. As no bushman cares to sleep with his back unprotected, I chose a position close against the thorn-bushes, and heaped up the fire, which was between me and any possible danger. Then, placing my loaded rifle in a handy position, I curled up on the warm sand and soon was fast asleep.

Now, there were various species of big game in that region, and I have no doubt that many were the animals which, going to the water-hole, passed close to my sleeping-place. But only twice was I disturbed. Once it was by the passing, dangerously close to me, of a herd of stampeding zebra—so close to me that I could hear their puffing breaths, and even could smell them; it was only by the narrowest shave that they did not gallop right over me, for the fire had died down, and there was nothing to hinder their progress.

The other time I was awakened by the roaring of the lions which had disturbed the zebra and stampeded them. The lions were within a hundred yards of my ill-protected sleeping-place, and for some time I sat up, rifle in hand, ready for whatever might happen. It was not that I feared the lions might scent me and attack—man-eating lions are rare creatures

AFRICA CALLING

in Africa; in this particular region I had never heard of any at all. My fear was that I might be trampled on by animals going to or coming from the water, or fleeing from the lions. At last, however, after carefully stoking up the fire, I lay down again and dropped off to sleep. Animals or no animals, I was far too tired to sustain any long vigil like that.

The next I knew it was daybreak, and after cooking and eating some more of the impala meat, and having a good drink of the water in the little hole I had dug, I set off once more to find my camp. This time I cut right across my trail of the evening before, hoping to strike another that would lead me home.

On I toiled all through the morning. As the heat grew more intense and there was still no sign of a nice broad game trail—nothing but the everlasting sameness of the thorn-bushes and a very occasional ant-hill—my heart grew heavier.

I began to despair of ever finding my camp. Perhaps I was merely wandering round in a circle, as lost men are so apt to do. The reason a man wanders in a circle is that one foot steps out farther than the other. Also, carrying his rifle constantly on one side helps to make him circle; knowing this, I had been careful frequently to change my rifle from one side to the other. But the suggestion was always with me that do what I would, nothing would bring me to the camp.

For a little farther I struggled on; then, just as I was preparing to sit out another hot noonday in the shade, I came upon an ant-hill which had on its side and top clear imprints of a boot! My heart jumped

BUSHED

at the sight. Some of my boys wore boots, and undoubtedly this was the footprint of one who had come to search for me.

That was the end of my unpleasant adventure, for, looking about, I soon found the man's tracks leading to the ant-hill and back-trailed them to the camp, which was then quite close. There was great relief among the boys at my appearance; a search-party was on the point of leaving to look for me properly. (The lazy wretches had put off the idea of a search-party till the last possible moment.)

I rested for the remainder of the day, and after that was none the worse for the adventure, tough though it had been. As to how far I had wandered there was no real means of telling, but I do not think that at any time I was more than five miles from the camp. In that type of country, however, I could have been a hundred miles away and none the wiser.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NANDI BEAR

IN the course of my journeyings I frequently heard of fabulous monsters of the ancient past living and flourishing in the present time.

In the Congo I heard of what appeared to be a dinosaur which inhabited the depths of the Ituri forest. He was variously described to me by both natives and whites, and several of the accounts were so circumstantial that to my mind it seemed quite possible that some enormous, odd creature *did* live in those forest depths, in the swamps. In spite of the fact that many of the stories had about them just that something which suggested that imagination or exaggeration was at work, I should be very pleased if the opportunity came my way to make an expedition in search of him. Africa is a land of mysteries and strangenesses, and a surviving dinosaur or two would not be at all out of place.

In the western province of Uganda I heard of the Dawn Beast of Lake Edward. This was a great black monster that rose ponderously from the depths, and surged and blew to such purpose that waves four feet high or more were created. The seaway sent native fishermen in their canoes flying for shelter, and caused a surf to break on the shore. The account of one of these appearances came from a Dutch hunter of high repute. From the edge of the lake he saw some such

THE NANDI BEAR

creature as I have described above, but it sank before he could persuade any of the terrified fishermen to take him out in a canoe to investigate. There seems to be no proper explanation of this phenomenon; the only explanatory suggestion I have heard is that it was the carcass of a hippopotamus blown out to enormous proportions, and that the imagination, and fear, of the natives accounted for the surging, snorting, and the seaway—which doesn't look like any explanation at all to me. That Dutch hunter did not imagine it.

Then there was the Nandi Bear. I heard a lot about the Nandi Bear, or "Chemsit," as it was called by the Nandi tribes. The Nandi Bear is one of the greatest mysteries of Africa, and is an alleged monster which lives in the dark interior of the great Nandi forest, and sallies forth from time to time and strikes down and mutilates anyone it comes across.

On many occasions in this region natives have been found lying under a tree, with skull crushed and throat torn out. The force used must have been tremendous. I know of no animal, save perhaps a leopard, which would kill and leave a body in such a way; but it would take a leopard far bigger and stronger than any I have ever known to crush a native's thick skull so completely and easily. There would seem to be no doubt whatever that something outside the run of ordinary experience had been at work.

The whites of East Africa were divided into two schools of opinion about the Nandi Bear. One school held that the animal was a myth, and that the natives had been murdered by fellow-tribesmen. The other

AFRICA CALLING

school held that there was, definitely, a new and undiscovered species of beast somewhere about—an enormous hyena of unknown breed perhaps.

There was, undoubtedly, some justification for the murder hypothesis; a cunning murderer would naturally take advantage of the accommodating legend of a savage mysterious beast. Although I had never heard of such a thing among these particular tribes, it crossed my mind that perhaps there was in existence here a secret society of the Nandi, similar to the Leopard societies of Northern Liberia, that killed and mutilated somewhat in this manner as part of a ritual. I declared against this hypothesis on reflecting that the brains of the victims had not been removed, or any other organs, or the blood sucked; in the case of the ritual of a secret society some, or all, of these things would have been done. Further, there was always the question of the great strength exerted in the killing of the victims; it would take a perfect gorilla of a man to tear the throat out of a victim in one bite, so to speak.

Taken all round, the balance of opinion was in favour of the idea of a large beast of some unknown species. To support this there was the evidence of various persons who stated that they had seen the monster. One such was a Nandi native, who said that while returning from hunting in the forest one day he came out into a small open space, and saw disappearing over the brow of a hill in front of him two enormous creatures, light grey in colour, and *walking erect*. He caught only a glimpse of them, but he was a hunter and quick of eye, and was able to describe

THE NANDI BEAR

them as being more than ten feet tall, with great broad backs, and bear-like in their general character. He was, unfortunately, too overcome with sudden terror to investigate further, but made quickly for his home.

Another of these eyewitnesses was a white settler in the Trans-Nzoia district. This man, who was a teetotaler, a non-smoker, and ordinarily truthful, swore that he had been attacked one night, when he was alone in his hut, by something that could only have been a Nandi Bear. The creature broke down the door to get in at him, and was, he said, about eight feet high and like a grey polar bear. This terrible creature, its red eyes blazing and jaws slavering, went straight for the man, and a chase round the table followed. Luckily, however, the man managed to grab a revolver that was hanging on the wall and fire into the animal's chest, at which it turned and, growling horribly, made out through the doorway and off.

I frankly don't quite know what to make of this story, as, apparently, there was no hue and cry raised, and nothing further done in the matter. I know that if I, for one, had been so attacked I should have dashed off to the nearest settlement, formed a posse, and, with all the dogs of the neighbourhood, got on to the trail of the animal. Yet, somehow, I don't doubt the settler in the least.

The only personal evidence I myself ever had of the existence of any such strange creature was one day, when hunting in the forest, I was shown by a palpitating game-scout a pair of very peculiar animal footmarks. They were two enormous pug marks, the size of dinner-plates, in a soft patch of ground. They

AFRICA CALLING

were spade-shaped and turned inward. The claws must have been non-retractile, as I could distinctly see the small cuts where they had dug into the earth. The fact that they turned inward revealed a bear-like character; otherwise I would have said that they had been made by the grandfather of all hyenas.

But, then, a hyena enormous enough to leave footprints as big as those would have himself been a fabulous beast.

CHAPTER XVII

WIFE ON OFFER

I HAD another experience of an unwanted child—this time a quaint little girl of thirteen.

The cotton season had ended, and, as there seemed to be no other carrying work in which I could employ my motor-truck in Uganda or Tanganyika, I had decided to go to Kenya, to Nairobi. What I should do once there was in the lap of the gods. With my three faithful boys and my truck I gaily set forth. I had done just well enough out of the carrying to make it possible for me to take a brief holiday in civilization, and hoped to make the rather long journey to Nairobi from the Congo border country in good time.

But on the third day out, in a remote district, we were brought to a full stop through breaking a crown-wheel in our engine—a mishap which resulted in our camping for nearly a week while a new wheel was obtained and fitted.

It was in this remote district that I first saw the quaint little girl. She belonged to a village near by, and had come over with a gourd of milk. She was small and thin, and had a limp. Her only garment was a short and narrow kind of apron, hanging down from her front by a string about her middle; there was very little that was concealing about it. On handing the milk to the cook-boy and receiving back the

AFRICA CALLING

empty gourd she seemed disposed to hang about. Though shy, she was full of curiosity.

Biting a thumb-nail, she stood there, taking in the camp and everything about it. In that region white men's camps were not seen very often. As I was passing the cooking place I took up a spoonful of sugar and told her to hold out a hand. With her strange mixture of eagerness and shyness she held out both hands, cupping them, and I poured the sugar in. Careful not to spill a single grain, she limped awkwardly back a pace or two, her eyes full on me the while, and ate up the sugar, afterwards licking in between her fingers and all over the palm of her hand. Watching her, I had a feeling of having given a titbit, not to a child, but to a shy little domestic pet.

An hour or two later she came from the village with more milk. We did not want any more milk, but she brought it just the same. That spoonful of sugar seemed to have broken the ice, so to speak. The next morning she arrived very early with the milk, and for the rest of the day stayed about the camp. She grew very friendly with the boys, and would sit chatting with them in the shade. With me she was shyer, but always responsive.

As the days went by she became a kind of pet of the place, and had the run of the camp. I had an old gramophone, and it delighted her to be allowed to wind it. She would sit for an hour on the ground just outside my tent listening to a couple of old cracked records that I had got out for her use. Often she would come to the doorway of the tent and peer with her quick and interested little eyes at the articles

within—my shaving-mirror on its nail on one of the supports, an alarm clock beside the bunk, an out-of-date magazine that lay open perhaps at a page of pictures.

One of the great moments of her life was when I handed her a cake of scented toilet soap to smell. Holding the soap in her two hands, she brought it up to her nose, and, burying her face in her hands, took a succession of deep nose-breaths—and mouth-breaths also, no doubt—her shoulders lifted and curved inward, her whole body given to the delicious indrawing of the scent.

“Ee—ee!” she chuckled softly, looking at me over the tops of her fingers, her eyes shining.

Thus more and more did she attach herself to our camp, coming early every morning and staying about the camp all day. Then one midday, as I sat having an after-lunch smoke, one of my boys came to me, a fine, reliable fellow whom I had had in my employ for years. It was our last day in camp—the crown-wheel had arrived and been duly fixed, and I planned to resume the interrupted journey at daylight the next morning. The boy had come for instructions regarding some of the preparations for departure. At the end he said, with a laugh, “That girl, *bwana*——”

“What about her?” I asked.

Again he laughed. “She wants you to buy her from her father in marriage, *bwana*.”

“Oh, she does—does she?”

“She says that as she is lame her father would not want a big price. She asked me to tell you, *bwana*.”

Through the open door of the tent I could see the

girl sitting in the shade with the two other boys. From the way she was glancing over to the tent I could see that she was eagerly waiting to know what I would have to say on the matter.

"Bring her here," I said to the boy. The idea of my buying her was quite preposterous, but I wanted to know why she was so anxious for it.

"Who told you that white men take native girls?" I asked when, with the boy, she stood before me in the tent. I spoke, of course, in Swahili; she knew not a single word of English,

"Everybody knows they do," she answered, swinging her body and speaking with her head a little to one side—gestures that oddly revealed the essential feminine in her.

"And why do you want me to buy you?"

Again there was that swinging of the body. "I want to go to Nairobi."

"Well, then—why do you want to go away to Nairobi?"

"Nairobi is good." She paused. "Nairobi is good." Again she paused. "Here it is bad." With me she nearly always spoke thus, in single sentences, though with my boys she chattered freely enough. Many natives in the remoter parts are slow like this in their speech with white men. The unusualness of a white man's presence seems to overawe them.

"Here it is bad," she said again.

"Her father thinks nothing of her," explained the boy. "She is lame, and cannot work hard in the *shambas*. He has other daughters, who are strong. They are his favourites. This one he wants not. She

can do little to earn the food she eats. Her father beats her, and she is very unhappy. She wants not to stay at home any more."

"The price for me is small," said the girl. She put a hand under one of her little breasts, and pushed it up and forward, to make the most of it. "See, *bwana*, I am grown-up." There was something intensely pathetic about the eagerness with which she said it.

"You think you will like Nairobi?" I asked.

"*Maridadi!*" said the girl—the nearest translation to which is "The pretties!"

"She means she wants to have pretty dresses and see the shops," explained the boy. "We have been telling her about what she would see in Nairobi."

"And the many white people," said the girl.

"We told her white people were everywhere in Nairobi, like the cattle on the hills," said the boy.

"I want to see the men that are large as elephants," said the girl.

"The what?" I put in, astonished.

"And the women that are large as elephants," the girl went on.

I looked inquiringly at the boy. "What lie have you been telling her?"

The boy laughed. "No lie, *bwana*. She means the moving pictures. We told her about them. You know how very large the people are on the white sheet."

"Nairobi is good," said the girl, looking at me sidelong and half giggling. "Nairobi is good."

"And here it is bad," I said. "Yes; I know." I turned to the boy. "I do not want her," I said. "Do you?"

He regarded the girl speculatively a moment. "I would like to buy her, *bwana*," he said. "I have a wife who lives in Nairobi, but I am away a lot, and this one would make a good companion for her."

"Then take her," I said. "Go and fix up with her father, and you can take her along with us in the morning."

The boy hesitated. "I have not the money," he said.

The girl held up her lame leg. "The price will not be much," she said. Apparently she didn't care which of us bought her; all she wanted was to get away from home.

"I'll lend you the money," I said to the boy. It meant that I should probably never get it back, but I was in a generous mood. Also, somehow, I wanted to do something to help that quaint little creature with the limp.

"All right, *bwana*," said the boy, and prepared to go over to the village to interview the girl's father and begin negotiations for the girl. Those negotiations lasted the rest of the day and nearly all night. It seems that the father was a tough old nut. Referring to his daughter as "this beautiful, desirable, and hard-working girl," he named a price of 500 shillings—cattle, sheep, and goats were the usual means of exchange in such circumstances, but, as my boy possessed none of these animals, it was agreed that money should be used. The boy snorted. "Five hundred shillings!" he cried, and remarked scathingly that the price of thin, lame girls had surely gone up. The father gradually brought his price down, and in the

end the sum of 170 shillings was agreed upon. What really made the father agree to a price so far below his original demand was my boy's shrewd warning. As the girl, he said, was discontented, she would probably run away from home in due course; and then Pa would get nothing at all. This, in a vulgar phrase, seemed to "get father right where he lived."

I gave the boy the 170 shillings, and he paid them over to the father—which was all the wedding ceremony there was—and next morning when we started off the quaint little lame girl was our happy passenger. On arriving at Nairobi in due course my boy took her to his other wife's hut, in the native quarter, and it was not for about two months that I saw her again.

Then it was in an Indian bazaar, and she was with the other wife. She was no longer the half-naked little savage who had hung about the camp and stared goggle-eyed at the shaving-mirror. All that remained of *that* little person was the limp. In fact, it was only by the limp that I recognized her. She had on a large, floppy straw hat with a pink ribbon, a large flashing bead necklace, a knee-length light green cotton frock, white cotton stockings, and white shoes. She carried a black oilskin shopping-bag and a sunshade.

Nor was she any longer tongue-tied and shy. She was standing at one of the stalls, with a pair of imitation silk stockings in her hand. These she was criticizing loudly to the protesting and arm-waving Indian stall-holder. The other wife, a fat and pleasant-faced Nubian in an emerald-green garment—wound about her—was laughing loudly at the Indian and the way her fellow-wife was defeating him in the argument.

I slipped by them unseen. Ordinarily I have grave doubts about the alleged beneficent influence of civilization on natives; none the less, I was very glad to know that the little lame girl was so happy.

This was not the first time that I had been approached on the matter of a native wife. There was an occasion when I was elephant-hunting in Eastern Kenya, towards the Italian Somaliland border—a region where white men were scarce indeed. I was offered two wives, and various other possessions besides.

It began with my meeting an old blind man who was being led along the road by another man. The blind man was a person of magnificent bearing, erect, and with just that something which betokens a leader. He was an Arab, of the Muscat type, and he wore a long mustard-coloured robe and a brown-and-gold turban wound round a skull-cap of white lace.

The man who led him, a servant, did so by means of a spear; the servant held the spear near the head, and the blind man followed holding the haft. Hearing my truck coming, they stepped aside to let me pass. I pulled up and offered them a lift, which they gratefully—and, in the case of the blind man, with fine dignity—accepted. We talked very little on the way, and after half an hour's drive I arrived at my destination—a small trading post called Gabatula—which, it appeared, was the blind man's destination also.

A little later I learned from the natives that my blind passenger was a most important person. His name was Sheikh Hamid bin Hadji Mahach, and he

had come to Gabatula on a visit to an Arab friend who kept a store there. Rather than official, the blind Sheikh's influence was personal and moral; he was intensely respected and admired for his good qualities.

"Sheikh Hamid is very grateful to you for the ride," said the Arab storekeeper, in Swahili, when I went along to the store later in the day. "He says you must have a good heart," he added, very simply and sincerely.

The name of this storekeeper friend of the Sheikh was Mohammed Habash, and he also was a man of good qualities. We got on very well together. On my first visit to his store, to purchase some rations I had run short of, I found him standing on his praying-mat, at his devotions. He made rather a fine picture as he stood there. It was late afternoon, and some rays of the sinking sun played full on his face as they came in through the top of the doorway. He was dressed in a robe that covered him to his feet, and he held his hands a little before him, palms upward. His eyes were closed, and there was a rapt expression on his fine face.

I quietly stepped back, and did not re-enter the store till I was sure his devotions were finished. A small thing, but it impressed Mohammed Habash greatly, and he thanked me profoundly. "It is good to have one's religious exercises respected," he said. The incident created quite a bond between us.

During my stay in this district I had my camp at Gabatula; every morning I took the truck and went out hunting, returning some time in the afternoon. The evenings I spent at the store with the Arab store-

AFRICA CALLING

keeper and his friend the blind Sheikh. Mostly we talked philosophy and religion. They were an interesting and well-informed pair, those two Arabs, particularly the Sheikh. After so much daily contact with natives who, whatever their other qualities, were at best only a remove or two from raw savagery, the evenings with these two cultured gentlemen were highly pleasurable and satisfying.

Some of the evenings were spent in a large room at the back of the store—a room divided by a curtain, behind which (though now and then betraying their presence by a giggle) hid the storekeeper's daughter and a daughter of the blind Sheikh, who had come to stay with her.

Usually, however, we sat out in the open, before a small open fire, the storekeeper and myself on empty petrol-cases, the Sheikh in a canvas chair. A fine figure the Sheikh made, leaning back in his chair, his robe loose about him, his sightless eyes upturned towards the sky! One had a strong feeling of being in the presence of some sage or prophet of ancient days.

We talked of brotherhood and unity. We touched on metaphysics and the existence of a spiritual reality behind all things. The Sheikh spoke of what he called the limitations of the senses.

"Take the thing we know as courage," he said. "If you went by the senses you would say there was no such thing. You cannot smell, taste, touch, hear, or see courage. But it is there all the same. It is a real and living thing."

The storekeeper spoke of tolerance as one of the

great needs of life to-day. Intolerance was at the root of many of the world's troubles, he said—intolerance in matters of religion, politics, race, and even individual, everyday opinion. As a Muslim he tried to be tolerant. All good Muslims did. They were taught thus. For instance, they did not denounce Jesus as the founder of a creed different from theirs; they recognized Jesus as a prophet of God just as they recognized Mohammed to be such a prophet.

In this connexion I remember once the Sheikh nodding his fine head slowly in confirmation, and then leaning forward in his chair and, feeling about, scraping up a quantity of the sandy soil into a small hill. From the base to the top of this hill he drew with his finger numbers of tiny paths, some of which wound very tortuously.

"It is like that," he said, his finger following some of the paths. "We are all climbing the hill, all going upwards. The aim and direction of all mankind is the same. The only difference is that we travel by different paths. It is not a real difference at all."

It was most impressive to see and hear it put like that. There was something very moving in watching a man who was blind expound a profound philosophy so simply and directly. My friends were both keenly sensible of my sympathy and appreciation, and one night the Sheikh suggested that I should adopt the Mohammedan faith—"take Islam," as he put it. He would instruct me to a certain extent, he said, and afterwards I could go to the coast and properly study the Koran.

The next evening he brought the subject up again,

and the evening after that. The storekeeper was also keen on it. I would make a very good Mohammedan, they said. Their faith needed such men as me. As a Mohammedan I would be much better off than I was at present. Should I "take Islam" the Sheikh and the storekeeper would make me one of their own. Land and cattle would be provided, and I could settle down prosperously. Should I wish it I could take the Sheikh's daughter and the storekeeper's daughter as my wives. Some day I would make the pilgrimage to Mecca and become a Hadji.

They were very earnest about it, and, I admit, I was interested. I thought much about the proposal, and in the end said that I would take it as a sign and accede to their wishes if, in my hunting in that district, I shot an elephant with tusks over a hundred pounds each in weight. Hundred-pound tuskers were rare, but there was a chance I might get one. My friends agreed, and said that they would pray for such an elephant to fall to me.

As it turned out, only a day or two later, in a *spruit* not far from Gabatula, I came across and shot a very large elephant indeed. In the excitement of the moment I forgot all about my bargain with the Sheikh and his friend, and only remembered when I came up to the dead animal and looked at his tusks. They really were enormous, and, with an interest I had never known before in such an operation, I watched my boys cut them out. It certainly looked as though the prayers of the Sheikh and his friend had been answered.

But presently it was revealed that this was not so.

WIFE ON OFFER

Because of a strange malformation each tusk had a great hollow in it, which reduced the weight to less than fifty pounds. The elephant was the last I shot in that district. The Sheikh and his friend resignedly accepted this adverse answer as "the will of Allah."

CHAPTER XVIII

BABES OF THE BUSH

FOR a rest and change after the stress and labours of the carrying work I stayed some time in a camp, which I shared with others, a little distance outside Nairobi. At various times at this camp I made pets of the young of wild big game.

Once it was a couple of lion cubs which a member of a hunting *safari*, having shot the mother, asked me to mind for him. Lion cubs make the most delightful pets. I notice at the cinema that whenever a picture of lion cubs is shown an appreciative "Oh!" comes from the audience. But in the flesh they are even more attractive and amusing. The two that I took charge of were absolutely perfect pets. They were very fat and had blue eyes. I brought them up on the bottle—a proper baby's bottle with a rubber teat, which I had obtained for the purpose. I had to keep a large number of teats, though, the sucking and biting powers of these lion babies being naturally far more destructive than those of human babies. The cubs loved to have their tummies rubbed, growling the while, and striking at the tickling fingers in mock anger.

They were always ready to engage in sham combat, and had great battles with three frisky puppies I had in camp at the same time. Almost always it was the cubs who started the fight. After all, they were

BABES OF THE BUSH

merely lions in little. The camp and tent floors were their jungle, the pups denizens of that jungle. The mock combats had all the appearance and atmosphere of reality. A lion cub would sometimes spot one of the puppies sleeping peacefully, and set out to stalk him.

He was too fat to exhibit the sleek agility of an adult lion, but he had plenty of stealth all the same. Each step would be made with absolute quietness, his feet raised only so high as was absolutely necessary; most times they would just clear the surface of the ground as they moved forward. His gaze would be fixed and tense. His tail now and again would move slowly from side to side. Inch by inch he would creep forward. If, by chance, the puppy moved and seemed likely to wake up, the cub would stop dead, and the stalking air leave him as by magic; he was apparently just a cub idling about, with no particular purpose in view. But the moment he saw that the puppy was going on sleeping the cub would resume his stalking creep.

It was a tense little affair to watch, and so realistic as to seem for the moment no mere matter of playfulness, but a real piece of jungle warfare. The cub would crouch as he came within leaping distance of the puppy. For a moment he would remain motionless, calculating the length of the spring; then, apparently deciding that it would be easier if he were a little closer, he would resume his stalking for another inch or two.

Then up he would leap, growling savagely, and landing right on top of the puppy. Waking in terror,

the puppy would yelp, spring up, fall over, get up again, throw off the fat little cub that was worrying him with every appearance of real savagery, and rush into my tent, whimpering loudly.

The pups, however, avenged themselves when they could by lying in wait in unexpected corners and pouncing on the cubs. Taken thus unawares, the cubs would be rolled over and over, and given a general taste of what they themselves had meted out to the puppies. Between them they kept the camp in uproar for hours at a time.

On another occasion some dogs in the camp killed a female baboon, and I succeeded in saving her baby, which was scarcely a day old. He was a comical little fellow, with a red face, red hands, and outstanding ears. When I picked him up he clung to my coat like grim death, his teeth chattering.

Among the Europeans in the camp at the time were a couple of young women. These girls were out of the camp when I arrived with the baby baboon, and as a joke we placed the little creature in the bed of one of them.

On the girl's return she went straight to her tent, as we had anticipated, and was immediately greeted by the shrill baby cries of the now hungry monkey. A moment later the girl emerged, looking flushed, with the small baboon clinging passionately to her, looking astonishingly human. We menfolk looked at her in sorrow, murmuring that we "didn't know you were that kind of girl," and handed her a milk bottle with teat, with which to start operations. It was crude humour, no doubt, but the girl took it in good part,

and the little baboon was christened Baby John and accepted as a member of the camp.

Another time I acquired a tiny zebra foal that had been found straying near the camp. He was not more than two feet high, and all fluffy white, with chocolate-brown stripes. His eyes were large and liquid. Everywhere I went he tottered after me, his wet nose only a few inches from my back. I fed him from a bottle, and he grew so used to receiving milk from my hands that I am sure he thought I was his mother. He was afterwards put out to a foster-mother, a native cow, and in due time became accepted as one of the herd.

For all I know he still runs with the cattle; but I fear the day will come when he will be missing, when he will respond to the call of his wild brethren in the bush and go to join them. While among the cattle he must know he doesn't quite 'belong.'

Another pet of mine at one time was a baby rhino. I named him Jonathan. He was a self-assertive and aggressive little chap, going through life with a fixed determination never to be left out of anything. His staple diet was milk and oats, and he considered the breakfast hour peculiarly his own. He would push his way into my tent as I ate and thrust his head up beside my plate and look over the table to see what the gods had sent *him* for breakfast. He had an embryo horn on the end of his snout, and was much given to butting experiments. In his innocent, playful, but nevertheless disconcerting way, he would administer short-head butts on me from behind whenever he got the chance. With Jonathan about, one had to

AFRICA CALLING

be constantly on guard, if only to protect one's sense of dignity.

I remember one of my native boys, as he bent over the washing of one of my shirts, being caught very completely off his guard in this manner by the playful Jonathan. The boy went head first into the lather, and emerged so furious that even Jonathan seemed to know he had gone too far, for he went quickly off a little way, lay down, and pretended to be asleep. As Jonathan grew up he became more and more awkwardly playful, and in the end was sold and dispatched to a certain Zoological Gardens, where to-day he is a deservedly popular figure.

Africa is overrun with mongoose; it is not uncommon to see twenty or thirty striped mongoose foraging together, and scampering away through the grass at the approach of a human being. I once caught a young one. He was only about a foot long, but he covered me with bites before I succeeded in taming him. But tame him I did, and in a few days he was sitting on my supper table as perky and at-home as you please, with a lump of raw meat between his forepaws and his teeth busy on it.

After that he accompanied me on many of my walks abroad, either sitting on my shoulder or lying along the sleeve of my tunic. Now and then as we went on he would raise his head and challenge the world with his odd little cry of "Rrrrr—ichk—ichk!" I called him Rikki Tikki. When anything angered him, however, he was quite another creature: his little eyes would go red and his tail flatten out; he would rise and squat on his hind-legs, and make

boxing movements with his forepaws, and voice a loud chattering challenge.

He was a useful little fellow about the camp. Before Rikki Tikki came to stay with me there were numbers of rats in the grass roof of my hut; but Rikki Tikki soon cleared them out. Once he fell plump into the middle of my breakfast table while holding in a death grip the biggest of them all. I jumped from my chair, and the two struggling animals fell to the floor. The rat had no chance. Rikki Tikki had him by the back of the neck, and was crushing the life out of him. It was soon over; whereupon Rikki Tikki stood on his hind-legs and waved his paws, and crowed over the twitching carcass of the rat. Rikki Tikki had had his breakfast, and disdained to eat his enemy, and the body was thrown out into the compound, where it was immediately picked up by a cruising hawk and taken to a neighbouring tree-top.

It was my good fortune to see Rikki Tikki tackle a snake. It happened one evening as I was bringing home some camp meat I had shot. I came across Rikki Tikki behind the cook's hut. He was dancing and bouncing round and round a tensely coiled, small, but very venomous-looking puff-adder. The puff-adder's wicked head flashed this way and that as it followed the movements of the dancing figure. It was waiting and watching for a chance to strike. I dropped my load of meat and seized my rifle. The movement caused the puff-adder to turn in my direction and hiss. This was Rikki Tikki's opportunity, and he dashed in like a little brown streak and fastened his teeth into the back of the reptile's head.

There was a tremendous scurrying in the dust as the snake flung out in all directions in the effort to loosen the tenacious grip on his neck. His tail lashed and threshed. He curved and jerked, writhing.

But it was all of no avail. Little Rikki Tikki hung on for all he was worth, working in his teeth every time he had the chance, until at last those sharp teeth scrunched home into the reptile's spine. With his vertebræ broken, the adder uncoiled, shivered, and presently died. That night I fêted Rikki Tikki, much as Kipling's Rikki was fêted, and he had an extra large piece of meat for his supper.

All the time he stayed with me Rikki Tikki was a source of joy, and I missed him sadly when one day he failed to turn up for his supper. He had 'gone bush,' and I never saw him again. I can only hope he had come across the future Mrs Rikki Tikki, and returned to his people to live happily ever after.

Another pet I had—this was at a temporary camp on the sea-coast—was a small lemur. These animals are commonly called "bush babies." This little creature had a long prehensile tail, and hands and feet like other monkeys, except that they were narrower and with spatulate ends to the fingers and toes. His head was small, and he had bat-like ears and enormous eyes. A great power of affection he had; indeed, he was one of the most affectionate little animals I have ever known. His habits were mostly nocturnal. Through best part of the day he would sleep curled up on the coverlet of my bunk, or squat peacefully up on one of the rafters.

But at night he would indulge in a riot of

BABES OF THE BUSH

acrobatics up and down my mosquito-net. His agility was extraordinary. He would hang this way and that, backward, upsidedown, and sideways. His enormous eyes glowed with excitement, and he made little chattering noises. He seemed eager for my praise; when he saw that his activities and the shaking of the net had got me thoroughly awake he would indulge in a perfect fury of racing up and down the net, so shaking it that the whole affair threatened to come down. When I shook my fist at him, or otherwise tried to make him stop, he would utter piercing screams—not of fear or anger, it seemed to me, but from sheer delight that he was attracting attention. Like all babies, this “bush baby” demanded attention, and saw that he got it.

I grew very much attached to him. He was a dainty little feeder, fond of fruit, especially bananas and oranges, and clean in his habits. But when the time came for my departure from the coast I had to leave him behind. “Bush babies” are delicate, flourishing only in very warm climates, and he would never have survived the cold nights of the interior highlands whither I was bound. I was really very sorry to have to leave him.

Other little creatures of the wilds I had as pets included young antelopes of various breeds. Many of these, while pretty and graceful, seemed mainly to be made up of assorted instincts, without very much intelligence. When, for example, I tethered them they would always attempt to strangle themselves with the rope. This was less from any attempts to free themselves as from sheer stupidity. In the same way

AFRICA CALLING

they seemed to have little capacity for affection; altogether they were not very satisfactory as pets, and as soon as they were fairly grown up and able to take care of themselves I generally released them, sent them scampering back into the wilderness. I had one, however, that was an exception—a small dik-dik, or pigmy antelope, who was so tame that he could be trusted to stay about the camp without being tethered, and would come when called.

He was a very tiny thing, no higher than a fox-terrier, and the most graceful creature imaginable. On his tiny hoofs he would wander in and out of my tent like a perfect bit of small animal statuary delightfully come to life. One day, however, he wandered out into the bush a little too far, and never returned. I hate to think and say it, but I am afraid a leopard got him.

To descend in the scale of little creatures of the wild—there are in Africa many insects which, though one may not make pets of them exactly, afford quite a lot of interest and amusement. I often saw my natives teaching one praying mantis to box another. A praying mantis is a stick-like insect, about two inches high when standing upright, with a long green back that looks something like a swallow-tail coat, and forelegs raised before him as if in some act of devotion. The boxing matches took place on the ground, in a miniature ring made of earth, and the excitement was very great. The boxing was chiefly a matter of one mantis rearing against the other, and lunging with his forelegs or feelers. The bouts usually ended in the defeated insect flying away. The boys wagered

heavily on the results, and 'studied form' assiduously. On one occasion one boy became such an expert on praying-mantis form that he won the money of all the rest—which money he 'blued' in a great 'beer drink' the next time he was in town, and got into trouble with the police, and eventually was fined for being drunk.

Then there were scarabæus beetles, more commonly called "tumble-bugs"—fat little creatures variously coloured, about an inch and a half long. I often sat for an hour at a time watching two of them rolling a small ball of cow-dung along the ground. This ball contained their eggs, and they were seeking, I take it, a place in which to bury it for incubating. The order of progress was always the same. In front was Mother Beetle, pulling and tugging and at the same time steering the ball round obstacles. Behind was Papa Beetle, pushing the ball and now and then butting it onward with his head. Sometimes one or the other would fall down a hole, and there would be a halt while the fallen one scrambled up and got its breath, so to speak. Tugging and pushing their ball in this manner, they seemed to go for miles.

My boys sometimes found a mean amusement in putting obstacles in their way, just to see how they would tackle them. They tackled them in the most matter-of-fact and courageous manner. On Mother Beetle's halting because of the obstruction, and the ball stopping, Papa Beetle hastened round to the front to see what was the trouble. Together they regarded the obstruction, viewed it from various angles, and seemed to discuss ways and means. Then, if the obstruction

AFRICA CALLING

was surmountable, they painstakingly pushed and rolled the ball up over it, Papa Beetle from his place at the rear as before, Mother Beetle tugging and guiding in front. If the obstruction was insurmountable they negotiated the ball round it.

They were a fine pair of team-workers. I have no doubt that those who like looking for morals in things would describe the behaviour of a pair of "tumblebugs" as a satisfying example of domestic felicity.

CHAPTER XIX

TO THE TRAIL AGAIN

MY next activity was helping a friend with a farm in the highlands away to the north-east of Nairobi. It was purely a temporary activity; with my restless nature, my great dislike of remaining in one place for any length of time, settling down to a farming life was about the last thing I wanted from existence. My spell of farming was merely an interlude between roamings.

It was not ordinary farming, however. We grew *ata* wheat—a wheat used by local Indians and others for making into flour for ‘chupatties,’ a kind of unleavened bread, or pancakes. Further, neither the owner of the farm nor myself had much money, and we looked to the Indians—who wanted our *ata* wheat—to finance us in advance. We had no hard-and-fast arrangement with them on this point. Everything about the whole business was casual; even my arrangement with the owner of the farm was hardly more definite than might be expressed in the phrase, “I’ll come along and give you a hand.” Wherefore, right from the first we encountered difficulties.

The Indians hesitated about advancing the money. We had a plough-tractor, but no paraffin—or money to buy paraffin—to run it, and it was imperative that we should get the land ploughed without delay and the *ata* wheat sown, for the time of the rains was not far

off. It was no use fiddling about with oxen-ploughs; our acreage was too great for that. Money or credit we simply had to find somehow; and so for a space we became not farmers, but money-raisers. The amount needed was small, but a small amount is a big amount when you need it and haven't got it; 'big' and 'small' are purely relative terms.

The Indians—they were all storekeepers—said times were bad, and they didn't want to put out any more money just then. We referred to the nearness of the rains, and pointed out that all our labours to date would be wasted if we didn't get the land ploughed and the seed sown in time. At length one Indian said he would advance us what we wanted if we agreed to let him have our *ata*-wheat crop at a certain price per bag. The price he mentioned was extremely low, and we rejected it with scorn. "Starvation price!" we cried. But we were glad to get that offer all the same. While we had no intention of accepting it, it prompted us to go to a rival Indian storekeeper next door and tell him that the first man had offered to buy our crop. We didn't mention the low price he had offered. We didn't say anything about price at all. We merely said that he had offered to buy our crop; and then we added, "How much would you give us per bag?"

This Indian named a price slightly better than that of the first Indian. We had been to this man before, and he had put us off, saying that he wasn't investing in *ata* wheat just then. But that was merely the Indian method of doing business; he, like the other Indians, knew that we were hard up, and was merely

TO THE TRAIL AGAIN

trying to 'get our tails down' so that we would accept any price at all. They were quite smart business-men, those Indians, with a working knowledge of psychology as applied to business. Our second Indian, however, when he heard that his rival had made an offer, knew that he also must make one, or lose our *ata-wheat* crop, which actually he was very anxious to get, there being considerable profit in it for a storekeeper.

But we two farmers were rapidly learning to become smart business-men too, and promptly went back to the first Indian with the glad news that we had an offer from his rival next door. Twice we played the one off against the other thus, and in the end sold our crop in advance at a very fair price, and obtained the considerable amount of paraffin we needed.

That was only one difficulty overcome, however. The rainy season, as I have said, was dangerously close, and it was a matter of working as for our very lives to get the land ploughed and sown in time. The area was nearly ninety acres, and we knew that we should be lucky if we had more than a week or ten days to do it in. We flung ourselves into the job. We took it in turns to drive the plough-tractor, keeping it going day and night; we fixed a head-light on it at night. At the end of the first twenty-four hours' continuous ploughing we estimated that we had done about eight acres.

This was good, but not good enough. We speeded up the tractor. We worked it as it had never been worked before. It was an old machine, fastened with bits of wire and what not in various places, and it is a wonder it stood the racket.

AFRICA CALLING

Up and down those acres went the rattling contraption, dragging the plough, day and night. We two fellows were the most strenuous farmers ever. Camped near our farm was an old backveldt Boer ox-driver, who, many years before, had drifted into those parts from South Africa. This old Boer, who was the raggedest and most disreputable white man I had ever seen in Africa, and had with him his wife and two daughters, who were really wild-looking, was said to have had only one idea in his head—and that was how to handle oxen: as a handler of oxen he was a wizard. But I know that he had one other idea, which was that two farmers who worked as hard as we did surely had something wrong with their intellects.

With one or other of his wild-looking—though handsome—daughters he would stand looking at us in a sort of dull wonder. His way of life was to wander about the country with his ox-wagon, doing odd carrying jobs, always taking along his wife and two daughters, camping anywhere and for as long as he, and they, liked, going through life in a slow, dull, bovine kind of way. Sometimes, when utterly worn out from long hours on the shaking and bumping driving-seat of the plough-tractor, I thought of all this and felt strongly that this bustling really was ridiculous.

At the end of five days and nights about half the area had been ploughed. The beginning of the rainy season was appallingly close; already there had been one or two light showers. Clearly it was going to be touch-and-go. We couldn't get any more speed out of the tractor. We just stuck to the job and hoped for the best, looking forward to the time when it would

be over, and we could sleep all night, and not have to get up at midnight to take a turn on the driving-seat.

By the end of the ninth day the ploughing was completed, and we immediately started on the sowing and harrowing. This, of course, was much quicker work than ploughing—and needed to be: the weather at last broke on us, and the rains came pouring down. We considered ourselves lucky to have got so much of the work done in time, but determined to try and get a remaining bit finished. For a time we struggled on, well enough; then at the foot of one of the ploughed slopes the tractor struck a deep, muddy patch, the front wheels sank down, and she stopped, completely bogged. It was as if the overworked machine had gone on strike. For ten days and nine nights that poor old tractor's engine had never stopped, and you might easily have thought, looking at her stuck there in the mud, that she had said to herself that she'd damn' well had enough and wasn't going another yard. Tilted forward like that, she looked tired and kneeling.

We told our boys to bring our team of oxen and hook them on. But they couldn't shift the tractor. The boys yelled and laid across the oxen with whips, and the oxen strained and jerked and swayed, but all without avail. The boys redoubled their efforts, yelling at the oxen with all their might. Natives always make a to-do about driving oxen, shouting as unnecessarily as a sergeant-major. There were these boys, then, trying every trick they knew. But the oxen couldn't move that tractor.

I got hold of one of the boys. "Run along to that white man who camps in an ox-wagon with his wife

and two daughters," I said, meaning the old backveldt Boer, "and ask him to bring his ox team and help ours to get the tractor out."

It was not long before the ragged old man appeared. But he had not brought his team of oxen. When I asked what the devil was the good of his coming without his oxen he made no reply, but just went over to our team where they stood hitched to the front of the tractor. One of the boys made to start them up again, but the old Boer stopped him, and signed to the rest of the boys and every one else to stand aside.

There was a little pause. The oxen stood with their heads drooping, listless and uncaring. Then the tattered old Boer displayed some of the wizardry with oxen for which he was famous. Very quietly, with little or nothing of command in it—in fact, almost conversationally—he gave the order to move. "*Hama!*" was the Swahili word he used.

The oxen straightened and took the weight of their yokes. There was a fine unity about the movement.

"*Karambi—huh!*" said the old Boer, in the same quiet tone; and forthwith the team put their whole strength into the pull. There was none of that jerking and jolting which had characterized their efforts when the boys were driving them. They swung forward together as one, evenly and stoutly; and this unity was all that was needed. With a sucking noise the tractor lifted and went forward, and in two minutes was clear out of the bog and safe on firm ground. It was a remarkable feat—all the more so when it is remembered that the oxen were strangers to the Boer. It was as if he had some link of understanding with them.

I had no money with me down there in the field, and later in the day I went over to the Boer's camp and gave him a trifle for the job he'd done. He and his wife and daughters made a strange quartette. The daughters—one about sixteen and the other seventeen—clad absolutely in rags, had masses of wild, matted hair that fell all about their faces. They were odd blends of coarseness and good looks. They spoke broken English with a strong South African accent. The mother was fat, slow, ragged, and coarse. She seemed never to speak, but just sit silently, looking before her. The old Boer was almost as silent—not as strong men are alleged to be silent, but because he had nothing to say. He was more devoid of ideas—even the most commonplace, everyday ideas—than any other human being I had known. He was little more than animal, and stank strongly of rank Boer tobacco, and was thick with fleas. On his wagon was a quantity of timber which he was taking somewhere. The family sleeping-place was on the ground under the wagon. About them all, indeed, there was something curiously animal. Even the natives looked down on them. That queer old Boer seemed to be a man with but one virtue—extraordinary ability with oxen.

That was the last day of our long spell of continuous work with the tractor, and we looked forward to our first 'all night in.' It was really wonderful to think that we could go to bed at night knowing that we should not have to get up a little while later and take a turn on the driving-seat of that accursed tractor. To go to bed and sleep right through till morning was a luxury that we looked forward to as children look

forward to some much-wanted gift. We didn't rush things. After the evening meal, we sat round and smoked and yarned. A bottle of wine was produced, and we sipped it with fine appreciation. We were definitely two gentlemen taking their ease after long labours. We talked of England and places that we had been to, reminisced about people whom we both knew. At last came the great moment for going to our beds. "No getting up in the morning till nine o'clock at the earliest," said my partner. "At the very earliest," I responded, and we bade one another good-night and retired.

That was at half-past ten. At four o'clock, just before dawn, I was awakened by a loud knocking, and a native voice crying, "*Bwana! Bwana!*"

For some time I paid no heed; then, cursing, I rose and went out. Half a dozen natives stood about the foot of the veranda steps. I recognized them as our "squatter natives"—that is, natives to whom we had given permission to build their huts on a certain portion of our land and graze their cattle and till it for themselves, in return for which they worked for us on the farm at a reduced rate of pay.

"What the devil's all this?" I asked, and my partner, who had also been aroused, repeated the question.

The natives all started to speak at once, and I saw that two or three of them were holding a man by the arms. One of our house boys had joined us by this time, and the light of his lantern revealed that the man who was being held was cut about the face and bleeding.

TO THE TRAIL AGAIN

"Cattle thieves, *bwana*!" explained one of the squatter natives, as my partner ordered the others to be quiet. "There were a number, but we caught only this one. The others got away in the darkness with the cattle."

"How many cattle?" I asked.

"Eight, *bwana*—all that were in the *boma*. Three of yours and five of ours. The thieves broke down the side of the *boma*, and took them out that way. It was only by chance that some of us heard them, and went to see what was wrong. But we caught only this one man. We know not which way the others went."

We ordered the prisoner to be brought forward. He was a thin-legged creature, with small eyes and a general appearance of shiftiness. He did not belong to the district, but to a tribe some distance away over the hills. As was evidenced by the cuts on his face, the squatter natives had been belabouring him severely.

"Which way are your friends making with the cattle?" I asked. The man made no answer. "Which way?" demanded my partner.

The man shuffled and stared from one to the other of us, as though he did not understand. One of the squatter natives gave him a prod in the ribs with a stick. "Speak up, or you get the *kiboko*!" I said. This was enough for the man. His hands went up before his face in a gesture that was a blend of shrinking and beseeching; then, with a finger, he indicated the direction.

The early equatorial dawn was breaking by this time, and five minutes later we were mounted on our ponies and off on the pursuit, first sending one of the

AFRICA CALLING

boys for the police. For some time we rode on without seeing anything of the stolen cattle or the thieves, and we began to think that perhaps the prisoner had deceived us as to the direction. We concluded, however, that fear of being thrashed would have made him tell us the truth, and continued on our way, which was on a cross-country path among the trees and over the hills. At length we picked up the tracks of the thieves. They were evidently taking the cattle to their own district, where, after burning or cutting out the brands, they planned to sell them.

Then suddenly we saw them before us along the path—two men and the whole eight cattle. We carried stock-whips, and swinging the long lashes over our heads, we dug our heels into our ponies' sides and rode straight at the thieves. They fled at once, dodging this way and that, but the whips cracking about their bodies bewildered them. They became confused and panic-stricken, and soon surrendered.

What with the cracking of the whips and the general excitement, the cattle had scattered, but some of our squatter natives who had followed us came up and collected them. Then, with the thieves tied by the wrists to our stirrups, and the squatter natives driving the stolen cattle slowly along in front, we two tired farmers, who had thought we were going to have a good sleep-in for once, made our slow way back in the early morning, and handed the prisoners to the police party, which had just arrived. "Oh, a farmer's life is not a happy one!" said my partner, grinning wanly.

That was only the first of a number of nights when

TO THE TRAIL AGAIN

for one reason or another we were disturbed and had to get up. It seemed that farming—on that particular farm, anyway—was an occupation in which one never knew what the night might bring forth. One night the cattle were stampeded by lion. In this district lion were rather uncommon, but on the night in question a pair came right up to our *boma*, and the cattle, scenting them, went mad with fright, and broke through the hedge-like wall of the *boma*, and then scattered through the bush. It took us all the rest of the night and most of the morning to get them back.

Another night some of the natives woke us with the information that the cattle were all taken very ill. Rising wearily and taking lanterns, we went down to the *boma*, to find the animals all horribly distended with internal gases. What had happened was that, in response to the rains, luscious new grass had sprung up all over our grazing areas, and the cattle—those of the squatter natives as well as ours—had gorged themselves with it, and the grass had fermented within them and caused the gases. All about the *boma* they lay, gasping. The distensions were enormous. Some of the animals were about half as large again as they should have been. Their skins looked as if they might burst at any moment, so tight were they. It was a most distressing sight.

The situation called for instant and drastic measures. The gas had to be let out of the animals at once. We got down to it and ‘probanged’ them—that is, with a sharp knife we pierced the distended skin through into the stomach. In each case the relief was

immediate. With a sound like a tremendous sigh the gas rushed out, and the distended body reduced itself to normal proportions before our eyes. As a surgical operation it may seem crude—the only point we had to watch was that the slit with the knife was made at the spot where the stomach was closest to the outside skin—but it was effective, every one of the cattle being saved.

On other nights we were awakened and had to get up because numbers of antelope—reed-buck, duiker, and bush-buck—had come in from the surrounding bush and were busy on our cultivated acres, eating the young *ata* wheat. Night after night we went out after these animals. The only thing to do was to shoot them. With hunters' lamps fastened to our heads—bright, acetylene lanterns after a bull's-eye pattern—and shot-guns in hand we went through the knee-high wheat. In the darkness the bodies of the antelopes were invisible; what we watched for was the gleam of their eyes, reflecting the light of our lamps. In this way we got many of the depredators; but the others grew very cunning, and it became harder and harder to find them; it was believed among our natives that they learned to close their eyes. Those antelopes did quite a lot to reduce our crop results.

After a while, however, the work slackened somewhat, and while waiting for the wheat to reach the cropping stage I went in for making a bit of money on side-lines. One of these side-lines was leopard-trapping. Leopard were common in the district, and, as good leopard-skins fetched up to £4 each, trapping them could be quite profitable.

TO THE TRAIL AGAIN

It was a work, though, that called for considerable understanding of the ways of wild animals. First there was the nature of the trap to be used. There were three kinds to choose from—the gin, the box, and the gun. The gin was by far the easiest to set, but I refused to use it because of the cruelty caused; it was a powerful, steel-jawed affair that held the captive animal by snapping its great steel teeth deep into its limbs.

The box trap was a stout log pen, roofed all over, and with two compartments—a large one to contain the trapped leopard and a smaller one to contain the bait, which in the case of most trappers was a goat—with a stout partition between. Once inside the larger compartment, the leopard, by his own movements, caused a portcullis door to fall behind, thus trapping him.

I had three of these box traps in various parts of the neighbouring bush. They had to be constructed with great cunning, and look as though men had had nothing to do with them for a long, long time. They had to look as if they were permanent goat-pens; to add somewhat to this effect I had my boys scatter goat droppings all around, in the large compartment as well as in the smaller one. All fresh earth that had been dug up in the building of the pen was carefully carted away. Everything possible was done to make the thing appear of considerable age and permanence. In order not to make the entrance suspiciously easy we scattered some thorn-bushes about, and even made a little *boma*. When all was ready a quantity of some entrails was placed in the small compartment. We then

smeared entrails on any spots where the scent of us humans might remain, and on parts of the trap where, through chopping or adzing, there might be a scent of fresh wood, which would make the animal suspicious. Even then it was often several days before a trap was sprung. Leopards were most suspicious, and no trap, however well its newness was disguised, tempted one of them straight away.

But at last one would slink up in the darkness to investigate the tempting odour of entrails and goat. (The trap had been built with an understanding of the leopard mind; wherefore, though we never saw a leopard in the actual springing of a trap, I am able to describe the procedure the animal would follow.) First of all he would circle the whole thing widely—from a distance of a hundred yards perhaps. As he went he carefully noted and analysed the odour coming to him—finding goat and offal, and no trace of humans, dreaded humans; this last was very important to him. Then he would sneak up a little closer, and crouch so as to get the construction against the sky, if he could, and be able to study it. His tail would be swishing gently from side to side, meditatively, and in the back of his throat he would be making a sawing noise peculiar to leopards.

Then he would go a little closer, and pass and repass a gap that we had left in the little wall of thorns. Then, determining on a line of action, he would flatten, and enter the gap with a little rush. Crouched, with his ears back and teeth bare, he would look from side to side, ready for instant action. Nothing alarming happening, he would straighten, and stroll over to the

trap and sniff through the logs at the entrails in the small compartment. Then he would get up on to the roof of the trap and look down through the interstices of the logs, and try to get his paws in. After a quick look round he would jump down, and again sniff through the logs, then lie down and try to rake out the earth at the bottom of the logs. Seeing that this was no use, he would get up, and go round and find the open doorway of the large compartment.

He would hesitate a moment, then lightly step in. Sniffing all round, he would go towards the partition. The offal was just on the other side of the partition and the smell very strong indeed. First the leopard would sniff low, then go right up to the partition to sniff high, and see if there was any way of getting over the top. This is when he would spring the trap. In order to sniff high he had to put his forelegs out before him—on to a rolling log and plank device, which brought the heavy portcullis door crashing down behind him. Like a flash, the leopard would wheel round and fling himself at the door—unavailing, of course.

I once came upon one of these box traps only a little while after the door had dropped and the animal been caught. I had been away for some days, and was on my way back home. I had left the traps in charge of a couple of my boys, and in this trap they had used a living goat as the bait. It was the frantic bleating of the goat that attracted my attention as I rode along the road on my pony in the moonlight. I found the leopard making the devil's own fuss. He was like a mad thing. He tore up and down the compartment,

snarling hysterically, and digging at the bottoms of the logs.

What I saw was a rushing shape, and now and then a paw trying to get between the logs. There was a strong cat-like smell. I heard a succession of thuds as the leopard threw himself up against the door. It was as if Violence itself had been trapped. There was nothing I could do about him just then; even if I had had a rifle with me it was too dark for proper aiming, and the bullet might only have spoiled the skin. Further, I should have had to leave the skinning of him till morning, which would have been bad, for it does a leopard skin a lot of harm if the body is allowed to grow cold before it is taken off. I could, however, make things easier for the poor goat, which I did by opening the door of his small compartment and letting him out. I have never seen a goat travel with such speed as did that one; away through the bush he went, straight for his home *boma*, frantically bleating his relief and desire to get there as soon as possible. Soon after daylight I returned, with a skinner and other boys, and dispatched the leopard. The skin netted me about £4.

The gun trap was a quite different affair. It consisted of an offal bait, with a narrow way of access to it, a loaded rifle—I used a .303 generally—suspended muzzle down right over this access, and a concealed seesaw device, connected with the trigger of the rifle by a string. The weight of the leopard as he stepped on the seesaw fired the rifle, which, being only a few inches above his back, got him every time. It was not as profitable a way of leopard-trapping as the

box trap, because in most instances the animals had been dead for some time before we found them. Further, they were liable to be eaten by ants.

Also, the trap was apt to be sprung by others than leopards. Once I saw a vulture investigate one of these traps—and get the surprise of his life. A boy who was with me noticed him first.

“See, *bwana*,” he said quietly; “a vulture goes in after the bait.”

The bird was inspecting the narrow way into the trap. It is unusual for vultures to enter enclosed spaces, and this one was hesitant and suspicious. He looked with his head first on one side, then on the other. He looked away, and searched among his feathers for insects; it was as if he were trying to pretend to himself that he was not really interested in the bait which he could both see and smell. For a minute or so he stood there in this attitude of nonchalance, and we two watchers began to think that perhaps he would not go in after all.

But the smell of the offal was too much for him, and at last he took a hop forward. After a pause he took another hop, then another. He reached the entrance, and with another hop was on the hidden seesaw. On he hopped, twice, three times, while we held our breaths, waiting for the explosion. It came with the next hop; the bird had reached the high end of the seesaw, and his weight sent it down and fired the rifle. The weapon was so arranged that the shot would take a leopard in the back, but, the bird being so much shorter in the body than a leopard, the shot blew off the vulture's feathers. Squawking and screeching, he

came out of that trap half running, half hopping, and with his wings flapping wildly. My boys and I burst out laughing.

“Ee—ee, *bwana*! But he is in a great hurry!” cried my boy. It was impossible to imagine anything more disconcerted than that tailless bird fleeing for the open.

Several other side-line occupations did I go in for. They suited me far better than farming. One was rhino-hunting in the South Lumbwa, some seventy miles away. Among various Cingalese traders and others in Nairobi, Mombasa, and elsewhere there was a good demand for rhino products. They wanted the hide for making into table-tops—wonderful table-tops that looked like the finest transparent amber—and the feet for turning into gorgeous tobacco-jars and dainty-boxes, and the horns for crushing into a powder to be used as an aphrodisiac much in favour among the Indians. Rhino horn is a remarkable substance; it grows, not from the skull like the horns of other animals, but from the hide; when the hide is skinned off the horn comes off with it. Further, it seems to be made of finely compressed hair, rather than bone; examination of a cross-section reveals these tiny hairs in their countless millions. There is, no doubt, an irritant quality about these tiny hairs, and this perhaps accounts for the repute of the stuff as an aphrodisiac.

I also worked a while in one of the settlements as a store-assistant and barman—which work ended with the manager and I falling foul of one another and right there among the groceries and things fighting vigorously and purposefully, during which the goods got well knocked about and scattered.

TO THE TRAIL AGAIN

I even put in a bit of time at my early occupation—gold-prospecting. Here I had one of the biggest disappointments of my life. It seemed that I had found the most valuable of all reefs. Every sample crushing I made with my home-made pestle and mortar showed gold in abundance—hundreds of ounces to the ton. I was wild with excitement. I told every one about it, and they became wild with excitement too. Then one black morning I discovered that the stuff in the mortar wasn't gold at all, but brass. My pestle was a portion of a motor-car axle, with a heavy brass ring on the end; with age, rust, and dirt, this ring had come to look like a piece of the axle itself, and I hadn't noticed it. With every stroke of the pestle I had ground off a bit of the brass. The discovery nearly broke my heart.

And then at last the wheat was grown and ripe, and we took it off, bagged it, and carted it to the Indian storekeeper. It was not a very profitable crop. Besides the damage done by antelope rust had got in it. Some heavy downpours of rain, moreover, just at harvesting time spoiled a lot of it. After the Indian had deducted the money he had advanced for the paraffin, also the amount of a bill for groceries and other stores, there wasn't much left for us two hard-working farmer chaps.

But had the farming been never so profitable I would not have gone on with the work. I could no longer have endured the permanence of it and the doing of the same tasks over and over again. I had helped to plough, harrow, sow, bring the land to bearing, and take off the crop. To start again and plough,

AFRICA CALLING

harrow—repeat the whole process—was too much for me. I just wasn't built that way.

As soon as we had settled with the Indian and shared our meagre profits I packed up my few belongings and placed them on the motor-truck. I gave each of the faithful old vehicle's tyres a testing kick with my foot, said good-bye to my partner, and got up into the driving-seat. My three boys climbed on board in the rear.

"Where to now, *bwana*?" asked one of them.

As we started off I answered with that subtly suggestive Swahili word which means "I don't know."

"*Sijui!*" I said. "*Sijui!*"